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THE PERSONAL TOUCH

EMMA BEATRICE BRUNNER



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BY
EMMA BEATRICE BRUNNER



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6

TO
JACK OLMSTEAD
WHO IN 1906 WAS A CONSPICUOUS
FIGURE IN NEW YORK SOCIETY, WITH
ALL ADMIRATION FOR WHAT HE IS TO-DAY



THE PERSONAL TOUCH

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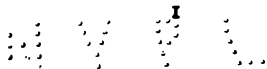
THE PERSONAL TOUCH

CHAPTER I

THERE was a crust of bread on the table and some cheese of the yellow kind known as American. It was the *déjeuner* of a man who called himself André Alain.

The table was small, varnished, of the one-drawer-sure-to-stick variety; and his room was three flights up in the rear. The table fitted in perfectly with the dingy brown carpet scattered with dingy brown foliage, with the paper of faded purple roses climbing a faded purple lattice, with the painted bureau that flopped down to one side in spite of the bit of folded cardboard under it—fitted in with everything in that room except the tenant who, in spite of all the ugliness and shabbiness about him, remained picturesque, simply because he was not an American. His small moustache curled slightly upward accentuating the value of a firm mouth in an otherwise gentle face. His dark hair was brushed in a smooth straight line from a broad forehead, and he had clear blue eyes—young, wide open, with an expression of surprise shining out of them, as though he couldn't make out why life had dealt with him in fashion so sordid.

Over one knee, as a man who dines throws a napkin, he had thrown a fine cambric handkerchief, thin and



worn, and then the impression that he was improperly set became indelible, for in a corner of it there was an embroidered crest.

Yet by every sign, from the elbows of his shiny coat to the edges of his frayed cuffs, Monsieur Alain had come to this pass gradually. No matter what a man who loses his fortune or a woman who loses her virtue may tell you, these things do not happen to either of a sudden. Thunderbolts from heaven are preceded by clouds and the sun is heralded by light, and the story of the Prisoner of Chillon's gray hairs is a myth. It lends a dramatic touch to say "suddenly—in a single night," but let us turn from temptation to truth. Monsieur Alain had had his warning as he had also had his chance. She loomed up now; the composite figure of the American girl with a crown of dollars in her chestnut hair. If only he had not had the temerity to specialize, if only he had not made the terrible mistake to fall in love himself, sincerely, he might have sold out in open mart to the highest bidder, like the tuneful maidens in the "Martha" of Flotow.

Their gay little staccato air beat on his brain to mock him when, in his despair, he catalogued the list of his own accomplishments, the foolish unsalable list of the dilettante whom society calls charming—"I can dance; I can sing; I can fence; I can play!"

He had been a month in this hole of a place and now he had arrived at the end, the vanishing point. Before he had decided to die he had tried everything he could think of to live, and not forfeit the loved one's admiration.

"Hampered by love!" His phrase of course.

Clinging to it as though it were a buoy to his self-



respect, he went out to exchange the miniature of an illustrious ancestor for a pistol. "One that shoots well," he said quite calmly to the man behind the counter. The exchange was easily made, for the latter had the soul of a pawn broker and more pistols in his stock than miniatures. It was on that pistol, by the way, that the purchaser finally lived for several days. He returned with it to his room, and then there flashed before his eyes the aftermath that any man may summon and that no healthy man quite realizes he won't be on hand to see: the vulgar crowding into the room, gazing curiously, ferreting out his history and arriving somehow at conclusions: possibly some one recognizing him, and he, helpless with a gaping wound, helpless under their impertinent, inquisitive eyes. Helpless—that was the devil of it! His identity oozing out with his life's blood, and with that the name of the girl for whom he would willingly give it! Her name echoed in that room, in that cheap sordid space! The thought drove him out of it.

With his last fifty cents in his pocket and all marks of identification, even the crest, obliterated, he crept down the stairs determined to avoid any posthumous scandal.

"I know how to do it without pain, without scandal, without even invalidating my life insurance about which I don't care a rap,"—Where had he heard that? Suddenly he remembered out of his boyhood a hearty ringing voice and then the strong virile face, with thick iron gray moustache and short pointed beard, of George du Maurier. Yes, he had said it, even he—the great *Punch* artist with the Paris education, the amiable satirist of Victorian Society, the poet of the nursery, the chronicler of Bohemia. He had had the

same idea—"Monsieur du Maurier qui comprenait aussi bien le Français que l'Anglais"—(he could hear his father speaking)—Monsieur du Maurier who used to come out to their home on occasional Saturdays, before the term "week end" was on the lips of everyone possessed of a dress suit case.

"There must be some empty lot where *sans peur et sans reproche*——" He bumped plunk into the red lamppost at the corner, the only bit of color on that block below Ninth street off Third avenue; a slum that is neither Italian, nor Greek, nor French, not even Russian; a gloomy, plain American slum, an unappealing, uninviting, half respectable, semi-genteel——

Fire bells rang in his ears, followed by a riot of shrieking whistles and puffing engines. They bore down upon him, roaring and clanging their warning in a trail of fire, in a cloud of smoke, in a rain of sparks. A shouting, gesticulating world, making wild dashes to safety, pulled him up short in the line of those sweating, snorting horses, in the line of those powerful, galloping hoofs. There where death lay he stood. His heart leaped—the blood coursed through him. "*Que diable!*" he cried, and jumping to one side he landed on the foot of an unfortunate bystander. It did not need an indignant voice to tell him he was a fool—he who had rescued himself from the very death he had been seeking. Death? Nonsense—in an accident one could scarcely make sure of being even maimed. The engines clanged on towards the east where a red glow spread the sky. As the mob scattered, a voice rang out:

"It's down near the river—an oil-factory——"

André Alain heard and stiffened quickly with an idea.

On the trail of it, through byways reeking of squalor and misery, in among the dirty docks and rotting hulks that lie in the shadow of the ponderous gray bridge, he came at last to a spot where the water, swirling past in a muddy stream, seemed sufficiently deep to meet the purpose of any philosopher who had finally and forever broken away from the thralldom of respectability. It seemed to him that he was now translated beyond all vulgar sense of desire, standing there alone, as much alone as a man must feel himself when he comes to the point of preferring death to life—alone except, he presently observed, for some small boys who had adopted the part about the pier where the mud was thickest as a playground. How young they must be not to notice how sad he was! Was it possible that he had ever been so young, so thoughtless, so gay, so reckless? By all the laws of life and literature, for though he was not yet in the water he was very close to it, he went back to his own beginning.

One of the boys had climbed out to where he would be standing presently, a little urchin with bare feet at the age when the river is only good to sail a boat on, and the darkness a warning that the glorious day is coming to an end to begin again as gloriously on the morrow. From that to this—the moment when there would be no tomorrow—the moment when the mystery of death was revealed.

Suddenly, it seemed to him into the very spot of his selection, with a scream of terror, something splashed. The small boy had pointed the way.

André Alain threw off his coat and leaped in after him, plunged, swam, caught the little body in the water, held it throbbing against him, held it sputter-

ing, kicking, splashing, choking, gasping. It threw arms about his neck—a human being clutching him for safety, a human being pleading with him for life! Nothing for it but to make for the pier. There a small crowd had gathered. From all sides willing hands were stretched. A friendly throng surrounded him as he landed his burden, none the worse for his ducking.

In the excitement he slipped quickly into his coat and darted off as fast as he could, dripping wet, shivering. He had saved the life of a human being. What a joke! Some one called after him, "What's your name?" He broke into a run. "Who is he? what's his name?" Voice after voice took up the question. And then as he ran, faster and faster, he heard cheers, ringing cheers. Why, they were trying to make a hero of him!

He dodged and hid in an alley. At all hazards he must preserve his name. In guarding it he probably escaped pneumonia.

Glowing and breathless, absolutely steaming, he arrived once more back in his sad little room where the first thing his eyes encountered was the remains of his *déjeuner*—a leftover bit of cheese and a crust of bread still on the varnished table. Ravenously hungry he fell upon the scraps and finished them. All the time the memory of the cries of the little crowd cheering him was in his ears. If they had found out his name he shuddered to think what they would have done with it. His name—well it was all he had and it was not to be bandied about in the public prints. In days past it had been a name to conjure with, an open sesame to the courts of Europe; it had admitted him into the honored households of great men; the

doors of American kings had opened to it. His name——

The dusk deepened, the last ray of the sun died and in the gloom he had an inspiration. It was such an astounding one that he pushed back his chair and jumped to his feet. He turned hot and cold with thought of it. "*Nom de diable*," he muttered as he remembered the first time he had heard of a similar inspiration. Only then he had called it otherwise——degradation, instead of inspiration. But that day his dinner had consisted of seven courses upon which his principles rested, invincible as the Rock of Gibraltar.

The past, the historical past of his ancestors, rose before his eyes as he turned to contemplate the sale of his last remaining asset, a heritage handed down to him from the sacred days of Richard Coeur de Lion.

"*Grand Dieu*, one must live!" he muttered in gentle argument.

Coaxing the little drawer in the varnished table this way and that, he finally managed to extract from it a bit of paper and the stub of a pencil. For some minutes he juggled upon it with words, English words, counting them, discarding some, replacing others, reading and rereading, until at last the result satisfied. He even began to think it strange that no member of his family should have been so inspired in all the long years of their gradual decadence.

He had written on his bit of paper—"For a consideration a person of distinction would introduce into society some one worthy the honor."

He waited, feverishly impatient, till the street lamps were lit, and then crept out with his hat pulled down over his eyes to a great centre of the town. And there it came to pass that he pawned again the pistol. With

the proceeds in his pocket he stepped, with some misgivings, through the swinging doors of a low stone building to a window on one side of a circular counter. A woman with red hands, huddled in a shawl, passed on; he followed her fearfully. But the man behind the window counted his words with stolid face, and handed him out his change quite as though he too had advertised for work by the day, or something equally usual in the list of things wanted.

Two days passed, somehow, before assurance came that he had been read. Then three or four correspondents, announcing themselves as "elegant" ladies and gentlemen, though they possessed neither adequate stationery nor English, wrote in answer to his advertisement to say, etc., etc., etc. One, a fond father, declared on a sheet of blue-lined paper that he had a pair of girls that couldn't be beat. Another held himself ready to give fifty dollars just for the feel of the shake of Mrs. Astor's hand.

Out of the half dozen there were two to be considered. One that bore boldly the signature, "John Burr Olmstead," requested an interview wherever the advertiser might appoint. The other, more reticent, signing initials only, asked Monsieur Alain to suggest a time when he would call at a certain hotel. He answered them both, and twenty-four hours later, with two appointments in his waistcoat pocket, he went forth to meet John Olmstead.

CHAPTER II

THE man who had signed Olmstead to his letter stepped through the revolving doors of a big commercial building. By every ugly sign it so announced itself. A skyscraper in a narrow, dingy, down town street, made narrower and dingier because of it; a skyscraper with offices on every one of its twenty-one floors all rented for the purposes of business, mysterious, ordinary, honest, dishonest—so long as the rent was paid no one cared. Above the clang of sliding doors sounded the starter's voice, and Olmstead, outwardly calm and self-possessed, outwardly as stolid as the throng about him, passed into an iron cage that shot him to the ninth floor. There was nothing to indicate that the most important moment of his life was before him at the end of the long corridor, behind a glass door, on which was printed in genteel black lettering "International Limited." Within it was patterned on a thousand other New York offices. It had a small vestibule, a wooden grill, a closed gate, indicating the privacy of an office beyond, and even a respectable looking clerk, sitting at a high desk apparently absorbed in accounts of some sort. A typewriter stood open with sheets of paper lying about, as if it had that very moment been abandoned.

Olmstead entered and closed the door behind him

carefully. The man at the desk looked up and slipped off his seat. He was pale and shrunk, with a thin, high voice and a staccato utterance that indicated a difficulty in breathing.

"Well?" he asked in an eager whisper as he opened the gate with nervous hands.

"It'll be all right," said the young man laconically.

"You found him, eh?"

The young man nodded and the other stepped out into the little anteroom to meet him. "They're in there," he said in a tone of suppressed excitement, "the Inner Circle; they've come to hear the result; it's the chance of your life and our only chance of holding them; they're waiting." He indicated with a movement of his head a closed door beyond. "We must pull this deal through—remember," he croaked. "No one knows why but me. Remember that! I've got something as I told you last night, something great! All depends upon you. Back me up strong!"

The young man nodded again, and the other, pausing first to slip the latch on the outer door, followed him in beyond the gate to a room where half a dozen men were assembled. It was a cheap room, cheaply furnished. On a small table there was an uneven pile of books, shabby and worn. Another table, surrounded by cane chairs, stood in the centre, and a small safe was open on one side. Scattered about everywhere, even heaped on the floor in corners, were newspapers and periodicals of all shapes and sizes. On the walls there were several frames, some large, some small, all of plain dark wood, such as might contain stock reports or market quotations. Here, however, they contained nothing of the sort. The quotations here were clippings from magazines, books, news-

papers; there were cartoons and illustrations, hundreds of them, pasted in these frames without sequence, regardless of shape or size, sometimes just headlines, often overlapping one another in their eagerness to find space. But whether from a colored supplement or an editorial page, whether political or comic, whether a quotation from a famous speech or a bit from some interview with an ex-president, whether a paragraph from a popular novel or the pet phrase of an aspiring philanthropist, they were all related to crime in varying sorts, to bribery, to corruption, to the injustice of so-called justice, to accusations and vituperations, propounded and reiterated by those whose words might be considered authoritative.

A few out of the disordered mass, gathered at haphazard, will serve to typify the others, and may even recall some familiar sources from which they were culled.

To the right, in a large frame on a level with the eye, one could easily make out: "Influence swings prison doors. If you have influence you walk in, turn around, and walk right out again." "For sake of millionaire's son—made no arrest." "While justice is said to be equally dispensed to the high and low, the rich and the poor, yet it sometimes blinks in politeness to those in eminent places." "The men that get the millions of graft have been and are the men that name judges and sometimes own them." "A man can begin his legal career, taking money known to be stolen, and still go to the head of his profession and live to wallow most 'honorably' in the plunder of trusts, as he wallowed formerly in the plunder of a vulgar thief, and the legal profession does not criticize him—it honors him." "Evidence of the corrupt

activity of the great railroads, from the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic Coast, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes, all engaged in the same corrupt activity."

In a space between the window were these gems: "The object of every great Trust in interfering in public affairs is to secure some sort of special privilege, or governmental favor, and by controlling the various departments of government to be immune from prosecution for oppressive and illegal acts."

"The ex-President makes a Campaign speech at the Ball Park assailing 'Corrupt Bosses.'"

"Sugar Frauds and the Trusts."

"Corrupt Alliance between the oil monopoly and the Federal Government itself."

"Atlantic tragedy—frightful guilt rests primarily on official heads on both sides of the ocean."

To the left one could revel in these:

"It is in the highest degree lamentable that, in one of the few conspicuous cases in which a criminal having wealthy and powerful connections has been sentenced to heavy punishment, a way should have been found to practically set aside the deliberate sentence of the court."

"The corrupt influence of the predatory Trusts upon our courts has long been a matter of National knowledge."

"The Pacific Railway lobbied in Congress and corrupted legislators, and used money improperly to influence the votes and acts of public officials."

"Our former President in an article entitled 'Thou Shalt Not Steal,' declares that his successor's renomination was stolen from him."

The men surrounded by these strange quotations were shabby, sleek, tall, short, smooth shaven, bearded,

shrewd, dull—just such a collection of faces as you might see in any group gathered together at haphazard. To allot them to any special line of trade would have been difficult. From their speech, rough, often mysterious, frequently incorrect, freely intermingled with oaths, it was, however, fair to conclude that they were not idealists.

Their talk was of money or, rather, of the lack of it. They were plainly excited over the prospect of getting into what was designated among them as a good line of work, to discuss the details of which they awaited the entrance of one known to them as Hackett. They referred to him in his absence as "the old man," again mockingly as "Mr. Chairman."

They were frankly contemptuous of his insistence upon a board room and meetings conducted in the most approved business fashion. They ridiculed his respect for what he termed precedent; they didn't call it that, they called it damned rot. At the same time they realized that he had on several occasions let them in for some good stuff. It was quite evident that for that reason they bore with him. They spoke of hanging on till they got news from the gang in Europe. They chuckled over the word "gang" and changed it to "Trust," smiling as if it were a joke. They talked of the old man's pal Olmstead, and then mockingly some one of them threw out the word "protegee." This Olmstead was evidently a newcomer, a comparative stranger, vouched for by the old man who had picked him up somewhere as a rare find on account of his appearance and manners. He had been tried out as an apprentice, and now he had been selected for an unusual mission. If it came to anything the most casual listener would have gathered

that they were all willing to continue catering to the old man in spite of their inuendoes.

One of them, shifting his tobacco and talking out of the side of his mouth, expressed succinctly the general feeling in this—"What the hell does it matter what line of talk he hands out so long as he helps us to land the goods?" Another, rather the most respectable looking of the group, whom they called Judge, observed calmly. "He's not here for long, a stroke 'll take him off any minute. Meanwhile what do we lose by holding together? Nothing. I, myself, would sooner talk of investments than—er—than—well, it's safer."

Agreement as to the wisdom of this was expressed in grunts and nods that died suddenly in a universal movement of expectancy, as young 'Olmstead entered, followed by the old man Hackett. He was scarcely old enough to warrant the title though he was certainly thin and worn, with stooping shoulders and shuffling gait. He entered holding out in a trembling hand a bit of newspaper.

"Erame it," he said in a tone vibrant with excitement, "One more justification for the Justifiabiles!" Then in a hoarse voice he read aloud: "'Every discount bank in the city of New York habitually violates the law!' That's a good one, eh? I just came across it."

He was as elated as a child with a new toy, singularly, pathetically like a child in the way he looked around for approval. He yielded up the clipping reluctantly, following it with his eyes while one of his companions with a grin stuck it up where all who cared might read.

"Every discount bank habitually violates the law," chuckled Hackett. He gloated over it for a second

and then, seating himself at the head of the table, rapped with his gavel for the Inner Circle to come to order. Solemnly he assumed the duties of Chairman. He called upon the Secretary for the minutes of the last meeting, he asked for the Treasurer's report, he referred to the Judge for what he was pleased to call expert advice. Except for certain mysterious terms, the proceedings might have been those of any group of men engaged in the formal routine of a business meeting. So formal were they, indeed, that they seemed to grate upon the nerves of a red faced, pugnacious person, with extremely long coat sleeves which hid his cuffs if he had any. A single word burst through his lips which he held folded under, as though he were toothless as well as cuffless. It sounded like "Hell!"

From the head of the table the chairman threw him a reproachful glance murmuring "Mr. Cryder—Mr. Cryder—" On less formal occasions his companions called him "Collars and Cuffs," but now, impatient as they were to get to the business of the day, they too frowned upon him for the interruption.

"Gentlemen," observed the old man at last, with great unction, "we the Council of Seven are assembled here to hear the report of our new member from Australia, who went from our last meeting to answer the advertisement handed in by your chairman." He acknowledged himself with almost appealing approbation. "It offered, as you have heard, to introduce some person of correct habits and large fortune," he was now sneering out the words, "into the world known as Society. We will now hear the result from Mr. Olmstead."

He glanced proudly at the young man on his right

who smiled back at him showing an even row of teeth, which under a small black moustache shone dazzlingly white. He looked singularly attractive, at least in his present surroundings, physically fit in every sense of the word, a man above middle height, young, strong, robust, with splendid width of chest and not too much flesh over his bones. His hair was thick, straight, black as an Indian's, his skin dark, while his eyes in such a setting were peculiarly light, amazingly alert too in contrast to a lounging, rather lazy habit of carriage. He had a way of straightening up quickly and suddenly. He did so now, squaring his chest and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. With a swift smile, as though visualizing what had occurred, he said: "I called his bluff this afternoon at Gatti's, on the East Side."

"What's his game?"

Another swift smile, and Olmstead answered: "Simple as ours—money."

"Who does he know?" These questions were thrown out by the chairman while everyone else sat silent, intent.

"The best," said Olmstead, this time with a touch of pride as though the absent man's position were part of his creating.

"Well I'll be damned!" It was the toothless, cuffless person again.

The chairman rapped lightly.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he said with a touch of irritation. "Some one should rise to a question of order." No one moved and he resumed with decision, "Mr. Olmstead has the floor."

But Olmstead was in no hurry to take it. For some seconds he sat looking into the distance, evidently

weighing what he would say, and how he would say it. In the midst of these undistinguished men an observer, with any sort of feeling for form, must have noted the harmony of his measurements, the distance between his level eyes, the well marked straight brows above them, the breadth and height of his forehead, his ears set close to his head, his nose bold, yet fine, his jaw, firm and clear cut. He was well dressed but inconspicuously. He wore no jewelry that was visible, his cravat was unnoticeable, he had on a tweed suit of dark mixture. Anywhere he would have passed for a gentleman, as the word goes, at this moment perhaps out of his setting. His companions, on the other hand, the best of them, seemed vulgar, shabby—not precisely dirty, yet not scrupulously clean; or, if clean, still not quite up to the mark, not quite to the manner born.

Deliberately at last, in an even tone he said, "The advertisement is genuine." Then he paused dramatically before he brought out the words they were all waiting for. "He's the real thing, a Count."

An unmistakable look of triumph crossed the face of the man Hackett as he eagerly scanned the expressions of the others.

"The hell you say!" burst from the lips of one.

"One more of the respectable on his uppers!" gloated another.

"And you landed him?"

Again for the fraction of a second, while Hackett's eyes burned into his, Olmstead paused. Then he said slowly "I will, if it's worth while." He delivered these last words with marked emphasis.

Hackett, now forsaking the formality of the Chair, made no effort to hide his enthusiasm.

"A Count! We'll make it worth while!" he burst forth vehemently, striking the table with clenched fist.

The others, at last, yielded him a moment of admiration. His enthusiasm was in a way catching, particularly as the first move in this new game had proved a good one. According to their ways and their manners they approved with oaths, with exclamations, even with applause.

Olmstead waited until the room had settled down and the eyes of all were again upon him. Then he took from his pocket a bit of paper to which he referred. "His name is de Guित्रy," he announced, "St. Alain de Guित्रy."

He folded the paper, replaced it in his pocket, lit a cigarette and waited with the air of one who had fulfilled his mission.

"De Guित्रy!" Rolling the *r* beyond its value and twirling the fine end of a small blonde goatee, a cinnamon-colored person concentrated attention for a second by observing, considering his nationality one may say with *empressement*, "The house of Guित्रy is famous, famous—I can assure to you that."

"Guित्रy!" It doubled with ee's, it stretched with i's, it shrank insignificantly into a jumble of consonants as the Inner Circle echoed it through the room.

Alone among them all Hackett showed intense surprise, even agitation. He started visibly at the first mention of the name and then recovered to croak out solemnly: "A judgment of the gods! Gentlemen," he added in a tone that rang with determination, "the house of Guित्रy is known to us, it owes us something."

Following this astounding statement he leaned forward smiling as one who expects to come into his own may smile.

"Gentlemen," he resumed, "some dozen years ago when the present distinguished Trust was still in its infancy, we—er—invested in certain stock belonging to the house of Guitry."

He would tell it in his own way and the others listened, now resigned, inwardly impatient but outwardly submissive.

"The investment," he went on, "took place in Amiens by the advice of our late lamented member, Mr. Baxter. We already had representatives in Paris, in Berlin, in Dresden." He told them off with the air of some great banker naming over a line of distinguished connections. "But we had neglected Amiens where there are so many really beautiful estates untouched. I am sure our member from Lyons will bear me out in this."

The chairman recognized Monsieur Duflon, who bore him out, indeed, with emphatic gesture and untranslatable accent. The gist of it was that the estates at Amiens were run down and so of great interest. Frequently, according to Monsieur Duflon, the doors and windows of the old houses were so insecure as to yield to the touch of a hand.

"Of course such conditions exist in America, too, if one can find them," Hackett remarked with a fine glance of intelligence. The Inner Circle had thrown off any sign of apathy. To a man they realized that something was coming.

"At Amiens," announced Hackett, "we were successful. A ruby necklace of great value was the—er—stock! If our treasurer will kindly consult our ledger of that year he will find there the record of the transaction."

In the moment of excited interest that followed this

announcement, Hackett sat back calmly. The treasurer, a man named Storch, crossed with authority to the safe. He returned to his seat with a big book in his hand, and turning over the pages quickly, read out at last: "De Guित्रy—rubies—lot 269—sold for six thousand dollars——" He forced the amount out contemptuously from between his teeth, in a fashion that resembled escaping steam.

"Precisely," observed the chairman. "We were more timid in those days when there were only a scattered few of us. Our late valuable member, Mr. Baxter, sold out in a hurry." Hackett was vague as to the details of the transaction, adding only, with a sigh of resignation, "The exigencies were such that it seemed to him necessary to dispose of the rubies at any price."

"In other words an unfortunate investment," one of his listeners commented sarcastically.

For all answer Hackett observed again, with significant emphasis, "So the house of Guित्रy owes us something! We are about to collect!" he announced with an all-embracing smile that was so conciliatory as to be almost benevolent.

Following this he rose to his feet slowly. He was thin to attenuation, with prominent features, sunken cheeks and loose clothes that seemed hung upon him regardless of what they covered, but, nevertheless, he was a figure of some distinction. His narrow, half closed eyes, faded though they were, his thin tight lips, bloodless now, his long nose, arched high at the bridge, with its delicate vibrant nostrils recalled the cruel masque of some Prince Inquisitor.

Straining his voice to its utmost capacity he outlined, in connection with the Count de Guित्रy's adver-

tisement, a plan of startling magnitude. He stated what he had to say in the fanciful language at which, behind his back, his followers were wont to mock. Now this same group listened intently, even respectfully. With this new proposition they realized, once again, that the old man had stuff in him. In a different sphere of usefulness he might have been credited with that subtle something known as personality. They remembered as he talked to them what he wanted them to remember, that it was he who had organized them, he who had advanced payment on the rent of the room they were in, he who had established connections for them that he was pleased to dignify as agencies. They remembered, above all, that he had even succeeded in collecting a small number of stockholders or associate members, who, lured by golden promises, were satisfied not to inquire too closely into the nature of their investments. By these very loans the Inner Circle had been enabled to conduct some unusual "operations." Latterly they had been unsuccessful, which might easily account for any disaffection. But now as he talked about the treasures of mines which would at last be open for their inspection, nay, more, for their manipulation, he was once again their leader. His figures rose so high that his listeners were actually awed into silence.

Duflon recovered first, "A De Guित्रy," he cried with all the pride of patriotism, "he can go anywhere." He waved his hand to express the world at large. "It is a family—poor but noble. Ah!" He kissed the tips of his fingers in ecstasy and waved them in the air.

"This venture of ours," Hackett resumed in the same enthusiastic key, accepting it as a foregone con-

clusion, "holds forth enormous possibilities which can only be grasped by minds, trained like ours to see beyond the presentation of facts."

He sat down and glanced at Olmstead who appeared to be only half listening, almost disinterested. With the eyes of the Inner Circle upon him Hackett continued: "But my friends, we must pay for our opportunities. That's what the young man meant when he said, 'worth while.'" He brought this out slowly and then filled in the long pause that followed with—"Ah, there it is!"

The men shifted uneasily in their seats. In an instant at the word "pay" they were plainly antagonistic.

"I know—I know—" said Hackett soothingly. "We are not rich."

"Rich!" mocked the Judge.

"One big haul—er—deal—one big deal will set us on our feet," asserted Hackett. "And this extraordinary opportunity, offered to us by the poverty of the Count, is an investment that should bring great returns. I may say immediate returns," he hastened to add.

This time there followed an uneasy silence. The Judge stroked thoughtfully a pair of gray whiskers. Cryder shot his hands nervously in and out his long coat sleeves. The treasurer hissed softly between his teeth. M. Duflon readjusted everything he had, from his goatee to his waistcoat. At last, looking at the secretary who was chewing vigorously, Hackett murmured, "cigars." The former rose, and crossing to the mantel, reached for a familiar box which he shoved onto the table.

Olmstead ignored it, taking out his cigarette case

again. The others lit up except the Judge. "I'm not smoking but—well—" He helped himself to two cigars which he put in his pocket. This custom, which he had made invariable, was received with a grunt, a smile, a wink. Then one of the Inner Circle spoke up sharply.

"I say it's the chance of our lives!" It was Cryder, vehement and enthusiastic.

From moment to moment someone looked over at Olmstead as though inviting him to speak, but he disregarded the invitation. Buried deep in his chair with his eyes half closed, he remained silent, inscrutable, even indifferent. Not so the chairman; his small faded eyes from between their narrow slits searched every face anxiously.

"Mr. Cryder has the floor," he grunted out at last.

"I move Olmstead goes ahead," said Cryder gruffly. Olmstead flicked the ashes from his cigarette while the chairman threw the speaker a glance that was almost grateful.

"Does anyone second the motion?"

At this the Judge was on his feet. The chairman acknowledged him reluctantly as one representing the over-timid.

In a somewhat rambling speech the Judge granted that the proposition was a great one, but impossible, impossible on account of the others.

"They will never consent." he remonstrated vehemently.

"The others? You mean our stockholders?" queried Hackett with every indication of surprise.

"Well, call them what you please; they'll never consent, never," repeated the Judge.

Hackett met this with an outburst of impatient questions.

"Why consider them?" he exclaimed with irritation. "Are we not the advisory board, the administrators of finance, the guardians of the funds? Shall we not, then, let to one another the use of those funds for the good of the Association? Gentlemen, are we, after all, to ignore the able teachings of honored bank presidents, the lessons of respected insurance brokers? Gentlemen, I ask you—you of the Inner Circle? I ask you?"

Hackett entreated them anxiously. He knew that their fingers were itching, that, in their minds, some of them were already dividing a storehouse of treasures. They were all plainly agitated, wavering between fear and greed. The most timid of them was the Judge who had married into the family of a shady legislator, and who remained ever fearful of forfeiting the respect of his father-in-law, through whom he maintained a position in a certain sort of so-called society.

As Hackett sat listening to their bickerings an ironical smile stole over his bloodless lips, a smile of infinite superiority.

"At this moment," he observed with contempt, in the first pause, "while we sit feebly groping for ways and means the newspapers are printing a guide for us, a daily guide in connection with the run on the Stuyvesant Bank. I can see the headlines now." He closed his eyes to conjure them up and with a long thin finger wrote in the air as though trying to recall the exact wording.

"Directors Withdraw Their Accounts, Unparalleled Bank Deficit." He quoted aloud and then he opened his eyes to ask "Do you get it?" He looked

into the blank countenances that urged him on to explain, in tones of triumph, that the directors had not only spent the capital entrusted to them by their depositors as they pleased, but that they had made good their losses before the deficit became known. "They know their business; they know what they're about," he cried, growing more and more excited.

Finally, under the still confused glances of his companions, he sprang to his feet and, with the air of a man who holds nothing but trump cards, he gave them quotation after quotation from the daily press. He began with a description of the vultures waiting for the storm to blow over. He described a cartoon that pictured the saintly expressions of the big men on the inside as they hoodwinked the little ones on the outside. He waxed eloquent over another that showed them in their private cars and yachts, traveling on the money of their stockholders.

"And when it comes to enquiry by a white-washing committee of the best citizens as to who's guilty, it'll be the other man," he chuckled, "one of them hiding behind the other. That's the value of an organization like this." He nodded, beaming to catch at last the flash of understanding in their faces.

It looked, indeed, at this moment as though he had won every man in the room. Even young Olmstead seemed suddenly transformed. From indifference he bounded to enthusiasm—literally. He sat upright with the quick movement characteristic of him. Intent, eager, almost joyful, he leaned forward as though weighing every word.

"None of us can afford to miss the financial news—the news of the gentlemen of correct habits," chuckled

Hackett. "Every word of this is in the morning papers!"

"Then I'm damned if this isn't the time for us to act!" cried the young man, flinging his cigarette to one side and springing to his feet at last. Scanning the faces before him he stood there alert, responsible, ready for action. Every trace of indifference was gone.

"I needed this," he began, "the assurance once again that those who rank as gentlemen are criminals too, only high ones, clever enough to beat us always at our own game. Now give me a chance!" he cried eagerly. "Let me get into this world of silk hats and prayer meetings. Give me a chance to compete with them, to know them! Let me get in; I'll do the rest!"

Hackett nodded with relief, with approbation, with undisguised delight, and the young man sat down amid an outburst of applause.

The timid Judge alone remained silent until the acclamations were dying, then he began again faintly protesting. "I realize, gentlemen, that it is a great chance, a great opening; to be, as it were, in touch, in touch with the millionaires of the nation, welcomed by them into their houses; nevertheless I ask you gentlemen to consider the risk, to reconsider——"

But no one heeded him. The meeting had become most informal, resolving itself now into a din of exclamations not always couched in the most elegant language.

"Without risk this organization cannot exist," Hackett managed to break in at last, though his voice was hoarse and he spoke with effort. "As young Olmstead has so ably said, we are not timid offenders to be ignored by the robbers who work in millions; we are a Trust too, as yet discriminated against by class

legislation. Our methods must follow the methods of the successful ones. Let us not be old fashioned. For God's sake let us avoid that! We have only a few stockholders as yet, but we shall have more. Meanwhile, by every precedent, let us understand that their money belongs to us. It is for us to decide how to spend it. Don't forget that today at Bâle a great deal is in progress. Our friends there are making a tour of the palaces. Shall we be idle? We with our boasted talents? We who have among us a Storch? a Duflon? a Pierce? a Cryder? a Bolan?"

Each man glowed to the sound of his name; Pierce, the Judge, still making feeble protests on account of the conditions of their finances.

Olmstead sprang to his feet again. "Isn't that condition because we have remained idle for months," he asked with a curl of his lips, "waiting for what our learned Judge would call a safe investment? There is no such thing. Look at the millionaires who have gone under, speculators like ourselves. Look at those that are on top! Look at the history of Wall Street! Look at the printed histories of the great Trusts upon which we have founded ours! They do not hesitate to speculate even in human life if necessary!"

He paused to let the tumult of approval that greeted this spend itself.

"Remember the lesson of the New Grade Western Railroad," he resumed. It was evident that he had been well trained by their chairman, Hackett. Now completely enrolled on his side he spoke from the same text books glibly, with apparent sincerity. "There's a sample of the work of the great corporations we are trying so hard to emulate," he continued. "A study of their methods following the mangling and death of

two of our honored members traveling on that line, showed us what?" Olmstead paused and taking out a small note book turned over its pages as though to refresh his memory. "Gentlemen," he resumed gravely, "it showed us a president who had in three years increased the net income of his road two hundred per cent. That president was Arpad Dunstan. But to do it he had doubled the hours of his men, he had let the trestles rot and the sidings fall! Gentlemen, these things are history, printed accusations of the most respected men of the country, the men who have made its literature. They are not original with me. They are there to be read!"

Olmstead pointed dramatically to the walls. "The justification of the Justifiable!" he cried.

"The cloven foot hides in patent leather!" Hackett quoted in an ecstasy of triumph.

"The Man that Pulls the Strings!" one of the group exclaimed, carried away by the excitement of the occasion and by genuine admiration for Brightman's famous cartoons, caricatures of a big capitalist, collected from an evening newspaper, and now hanging on the wall behind him.

"Brightman! There's a man of courage, of real convictions!" cried Olmstead with enthusiasm.

Hackett, with the air of one bringing a great mind to bear upon a weighty proposition, now interrupted gravely.

"We have but one object, money. Our stockholders, like those of any big corporation, have but one object—money. Shall we increase their earnings? That's all that concerns them. What they want are profits, fat ones; we are going to share with them fairly," he concluded, smiling generously upon his com-

panions. "They shall have something for their money."

"That's the talk!"

"We must get results. We must do things."

"Our annual meeting is soon due! With the success of this venture we can declare our first dividend!" cried Hackett with enthusiasm.

His eyes followed Olmstead who had crossed the room, and, turning now, stood with his back to the mantelpiece.

"This is the opportunity," he said gravely. "Hitherto we have worked in the dark, always at a disadvantage, dealing with the vague public, without chance to pick and choose. Now through this Count we may discriminate, we may know the men and women who are to—" he paused just a perceptible instant, "to assist us to live," he resumed with one of his most convincing smiles. "This is the opportunity that I've been waiting for ever since the night I sat gazing at a certain lovely creature at a theatre in London; as near to her as I am to you, Mr. Chairman, and yet as far apart as class can set two human beings. She looked like an angel." Some one gave an ugly grunt. "You're right, she may be a devil," said Olmstead quickly, and then with another smile he added: "But there was a string of pearls about her neck; they are always with her. Gentlemen, her name is Kate Dunstan; her father is Arpad Dunstan, millionaire president of the New Grade Railroad of the West."

At this every man in the room made a distinct movement of protest.

"Gentlemen, I have stipulated an introduction to that house," Olmstead observed quietly.

The Inner Circle responded with an avalanche of

lurid epithets that expressed amazement, admiration, approval, fear, cunning.

"Why not?" asked the young man. "I want to be near those pearls again."

"It is full two years since we acquired our few bits of his gold service," declared Hackett.

"Yes, but he's on the hunt for them still," cried the timid Judge. "I know, I tell you I know."

"And is that a reason to avoid him?" Olmstead asked the question indulgently.

"There have been hints in the press that entrance to the Dunstan mansion was not effected by any one man alone," protested the Judge.

"They call us a gang instead of a Trust," Hackett explained, quite as though that were the point, adding with bitterness, "A distinction without a difference."

"Then the greatest safeguard we can have is for one of us to be a welcome guest through the front door of the house of Arpad Dunstan," Olmstead declared firmly.

He looked around the room and then with the air of a soldier offering to sacrifice his life for the good of his country, he cried:

"I propose to become that guest! I am going to be introduced to those pearls!"

"Bravo! Bravo!" burst from two enthusiasts.

"Well, what's the proposition?" some one snarled finally.

"To make big money we must spend—er—money," Hackett observed. "This venture will cost—er—something." He paused and with an air that seemed to indicate a desire to be exact, looked at Olmstead.

"Probably not more than a few hundred," the young man said easily.

It was out at last; the Inner Circle received it variously, with jeers, with oaths, with sighs, with ominous silence.

Olmstead gave them their moment, and then, quite as though their approval had been unanimous, he resumed. "After the first plunge I can exploit myself with small and easy investments. I will carry this Count along with me; I guarantee to do that. But, naturally, I must first impress him. And I can," he said, drawing himself up to his full height. "I know as much as he does and more. I know as much as most men of my age in what is called society. You have sent for me because of this, because I can represent you with credit in this most unusual deal—the chance of a life time. Well, I'm ready."

He confronted them apparently perfectly sure of himself, returning their glances with ease, hiding any contempt he might have for them, inviting their acceptance of him, supplementing his appeal for it with the vital point. "For a couple of weeks, possibly, until I get the hang of things I may have to be financed; then—well, that's all."

There was not a man left sitting now except Hackett.

In excited groups the others stood about gesticulating, wrangling, whispering, explaining.

"Remember it's an investment for great returns," Olmstead exclaimed.

"It's for the good of all!" ejaculated another.

"But it needs more discussion," began the Judge lamely.

"Let us vote first and discuss after," quoted Hackett in the words of a great financier, smiling, even as he

may have smiled to think he had so ably solved a difficult problem.

"Before resolving ourselves into a committee of arrangements," he resumed importantly, "as members of the executive committee do we agree upon this investment?"

This time the ayes were unanimous though that of the Judge was reluctant.

"I am proud to accept the great honor you have conferred on me," cried Olmstead, "the greatest gift you have in your possession to confer, for the greatest gift that can be given to any man who has the stuff in him is the opportunity."

"And now," said the chairman with a bland smile, "as members of the finance committee we may ratify the resolution, so, gentlemen, I move you——"

He droned out his resolution which was carried through amicably. Then, following the traditional method of all important board meetings, each director gravely pocketed for his services in behalf of the great Trust he represented, not the customary twenty dollar gold piece, alas, but a bit of silver.

"Some day," croaked Hackett solemnly, "I predict our bit of silver will be changed to gold! This investment will point the way."

CHAPTER III

THE committee of arrangements had relegated themselves mainly to the question of financing their venture with the least possible expenditure to themselves. A program, largely made up of sentences containing the words "bluff" and "float," was finally drawn up, and, after much bickering to and fro, it was agreed that Hackett should serve as a go-between while apparently acting as secretary to John Burr Olmstead, millionaire mining expert from Australia. The committee realized that only a man of education could fill adequately such a post, and also that Hackett's very ill health gave him a certain air of respectability.

"Man of Affairs," he named himself, holding in his thin wasted hand his black rimmed glasses. He half closed his pale eyelids over his narrow eyes and smiled with satisfaction as he conjured up the effect of the title when, surrounded by empty chairs and smouldering cigar stumps, he and Olmstead were at last alone in the stuffy atmosphere of the board room, left to consider their mode of procedure. The young man flung open the windows and then turned to Hackett expectantly.

"A great game, my boy, a great game," cried the latter, coming close up to him and echoing, with visible excitement, the departing financiers, "But they haven't an idea why," he added in a whisper.

"Neither have I," said Olmstead at last. He waited, looking out over the gray vista filled with gray chimneys, irregular slate roofs, gray spires, gray towers, over through clouds of gray smoke, to that portion of the city which is just as gray, but which, as it happened to be the centre of his desires, loomed up out of the gloom in glowing colors. However, his enthusiasm was slowly waning as he began to appreciate the risks into which this venture must plunge him.

Meanwhile the other, walking up and down the room, observed again with enthusiasm, "A great game!" Then pausing he added, "But it must be played in a great way, played as the big financiers would play it, backed by influence; influence—that's their winning card always."

He closed one of the windows and standing with his back to it, resumed, in a tone weighted with ironical meaning—

"But you, you're to walk unprotected right into the mansions of the mighty, where every one will open his arms to you in welcome—eh?" The old man chuckled mockingly. "You're just to plunge your hands into their bags of plenty—eh? Unprotected!" he repeated with sarcastic emphasis. "Well, we'll see."

"What will we see?" asked Olmstead at last.

"Wait!" Hackett held up a warning hand. "I know their ways; they're not educated yet," he muttered and went out to the gate. Then satisfied from his survey that he and Olmstead were really alone, he came feebly back and sank into a seat gasping. His lips were blue as Olmstead sprang to his side.

"In my pocket, the left—there——" He guided the younger man's hand to a small flask. "Half a dozen drops—now—so——"

Olmstead stood over him assisting without emotion in his recovery. He had seen him this way before; he knew the various stages of his attacks; he had, in fact, been warned that one of them would some day prove fatal. This he accepted with the philosophy that one accords sometimes even to the misfortune of a near relative. Perhaps the fact that he hadn't known until he was almost ten years of age how close the relationship was, had something to do with his indifference. Before that he had led a precarious existence between institutions and the streets. Then suddenly he became conscious of a change. He ceased to be a malefactor on account of the delinquent who hadn't come up to mark with money due for him. Some one was paying his bills. Thus he became aware of the existence of a parent, a tall, stern, nervous man, who came himself and took him away from the school where he hadn't come up to mark.

"Never mind, it won't happen again," he had said, "I've got it fixed."

He knew now what that meant, but then he only asked in weak imitation of the other boys, "Are we going home?"

His father looked at him and, for all explanation, answered: "You have no mother." Small as he was, instinct told him that was an explanation.

A little later he learned that his mother had been drowned in a wreck at sea when he was two years old. And with the knowledge he heard for the hundredth time that the rich people were against him, that they had killed his mother, that they had sent her out to sea in a boat loaded with rotten life preservers and too few life boats, that they had caused his father's ill-health by driving him to work in a lead mine. Facts

all borne out by printed statements from a press that some people are trying to free! The founders of the Justifiabes, seeking to gather inspiration as best they could from its restricted, muzzled columns, came upon this headline in double lead type: "Social Leader Sells Child for Fifty Thousand Dollars to Husband Whom She Divorced for Cruelty." Recognizing it as the kind of propaganda they needed against the menace of favoritism, they pounced upon it as a basis for a law making it expedient to break all family ties, at least barring any recognition of them in the association. Thus it came to pass that Hackett's son was entered into membership as a young stranger by the name of Olmstead.

The rich! The rich! For all his miseries they were to blame.

"Then we are not rich!" Olmstead remembered asking one day of the man Baxter.

"No, but we will be," Baxter answered.

"How horrible!" exclaimed the boy. He couldn't understand until much later why this was a remark to be laughed at.

If they were not rich there were times, however, when they had plenty of money, and then the boy lived at first-class hotels and received something of an education, at least he became familiar with the censored paragraphs that were to form his Bible.

They were burned into his brain long before he understood what they meant.

"I'm all right," said Hackett, presently, with amazing strength, "and ready for the great moment, your entrance into society!" He uttered it with triumph, as a proud mother might speak to her debutante daughter. "Why?" The old man questioned dra-

matically, but plainly not because he expected any answer but his own. "Because I'm equipped for it, for the exit, my boy!" He paused for some appreciative comment.

"Oh, that's it," said Olmstead at last. "Well, what have you got?"

But the other wasn't to be hurried. Possibly he realized that in revealing his hand he was relinquishing some of his power.

"Any fool can make an entrance," he went on, "but it takes a wise man to make a good exit. Voltaire got into the Bastille, but he got out. Oh, I know some history too!"

Olmstead nodded indulgently.

"Well, you're my son in spite of everything," the old man blurted out now in the privacy of the board room; "and you're not going into this game without influence. It was Baxter's idea to educate you; he always said you'd do us credit."

Hackett claimed him proudly now, but there had been a time when he had been gravely apprehensive of him, an anxious time when he realized that the boy was slipping from his control, beginning to reason conventionally for himself, feeling his strength as it were, and longing to pit it against the world in a way that he called honest. In vain Hackett expounded and anathematized, in vain he quoted precedent upon precedent to prove what he preached. In vain, all in vain; the lad was one of those who must have training, real training, the training that he himself had been through, the training that fills and refills the jails with criminals.

At last Hackett had had the inspiration to leave him alone in a strange town, friendless and penniless. He

had deserted him and, for its own mysterious reasons, so also had Providence.

To detail what followed would be to chronicle a series of misfortunes and hardships, bitter failures and ensuing desperation; the terrible pressure of hunger, poverty, degradation. Fate or accident, ill luck or the devil, assisted Hackett all along the line, for when the lad was at his wit's end he had been stricken with fever upon which followed weeks of delirium. He woke to find himself a pauper in the free ward of a hospital.

When he came out he was equipped at last to take his place as a humble apprentice in the ranks of the Justifiabes, and, straightway, the pendulum of his luck swung to the other extreme. For the first time the world was willing to yield him the living which, until he had learned to serve the devil, it had refused him. He served him so well that, while he was still an apprentice, he was sent on Hackett's recommendation to try his skill and recover his health in Australia. There his wits sharpened, his nerves strengthened, his education widened. Whatever the mysterious force that had guided his destinies the sudden, surprising turn in his fortune prepared him to bow to its supremacy. He went from success to success, until, with the present assignment, he had been advanced to the confidence of the Inner Circle.

Slowly and mysteriously Hackett took from his pocket a small worn black book.

"My diary," he said, patting it gently. "A man must confide in some one." You were not old enough; Baxter was dead; so this! A man's a fool who thinks he doesn't need a confidant. Murder will out, and that's the reason."

He replaced the diary in his pocket after taking from between its pages a bit of paper, pinkish with a white margin.

From where he sat the young man could see printed across the top in deeper red letters—"Fifth Avenue Bank."

"Look!" cried Hackett in triumph, as he held it out in his shaking hand. "On its face value worth two hundred dollars! To you, properly manipulated, worth God knows what!"

With fascinated eyes Olmstead watched him.

"Mildred Dunstan, wife of Arpad, had a lover; for certain reasons he sold her check to me. He was in society! Society—bah!" With not too much elegance, but with adequate expression the old man spat into the room. "See," he went on with some excitement, "pay to the order of—that's her writing, and endorsed to me by him! I never cashed it; no matter how poor I was, no matter how far down, no matter how great the temptation, I held on to it. That's playing the game, eh?"

"How do you know he was her lover?" asked Olmstead with the air of one dealing with a mighty proposition, weighing every side.

"How do I know? Because I saw one of her letters to him. He had kept just one. I didn't succeed in getting it because before I could get my hold on him he had sold it to her, returned it to her for this check. He needed money. He was sick, dying; he's dead, but this lives; I paid high for it. The cuss knew its value."

"So did my father," breathed Olmstead in a tone that mingled admiration and sarcasm.

"In time of peace, prepare for war," chuckled the

old man, ignoring humanly enough anything but the admiration.

"Now you know why I told you to stipulate an introduction to the Dunstons when you went to answer the advertisement of a desperate fool. Now you know why I want you in society. Now you know what I've done for you; eh?"

He was like any father in his appreciation of this. His son, however, realized that the time had at last come when the old man must trust some one, since he no longer had the strength to manipulate the weapons of defence which he had collected for himself.

"When the moment becomes dangerous present this to Mildred," Hackett went on. "She'll be only too glad to assist at your exit. That's what I call influence."

He sat gloating while Olmstead walked over with the check to the window. He examined it closely, then placing it carefully in a small case in his inside pocket, he said, "It should give me courage."

"Don't be afraid of them," growled the other. "You know what they are; smug, satisfied, selfish. But with that check and the organization back of you, you should pull through."

Hackett looked at him confidently, and then discoursed for some moments, eloquently, upon the advantages of holding together. It was plain to be seen that to be the head, the director of something in the nature of a company or union, had been the dream of his life. He went back, naturally, to the founding of the Association, skimming over its history which seemed to have been a succession of ruptures and reconciliations. He was vague as to many of his investments, remarking frequently that small details didn't interest him. He had a way of becoming in-

scrutable, almost distant, at a moment's notice, apparently priding himself upon telling only what he wanted to tell. He referred quite frankly, however, to the time when he had paid men to come into the company, bribed them with money.

"Oh, it's done," he said, "directors are paid. These I got for nothing, just on the strength of the Organization," he explained impressively. "To get the stockholders I had to put up a bluff. That's regular too, always done, you've got to pretend you've got lots of money or no one will come in. I got ten stockholders on the strength of this Board Room."

He gazed about him proudly at the small, very bare, uninteresting place. He told how he had paid the first month's rent out of a little deal of his own, how he had hired the typewriter and chairs and tables and safe. Without this display he realized he couldn't have secured a single stockholder. It took courage.

"But I've got them at last," he cried. "Now the thing is to keep them. I count on you for that; one big success, then you can command division of property, regard for the weak, and all the rest. If at our meeting next month, our first annual meeting, we can announce an advance on our shares—think of it—think what it will mean!"

"Without telling how we did it," the young man put in.

"My dream is to declare a dividend on the stock you bring in. See? Then we can hold our members and through them get others, and sell more and more of the company's shares till at last we're on our feet. See?"

Hackett walked up and down the room several times,

as though looking at it from every glorious aspect, and then turned to say:

"If anything goes wrong you pull out on that check."

"If it is all you say——" Olmstead demurred.

"And if not," Hackett answered quickly, "if by any accident this Mildred Dunstan should have confided in her husband, they do sometimes, then——"

"What?"

The old man's eyes blazed into his just for an instant. He seemed about to reveal something tremendous, then the light died and only suspicion looked out from between the two narrow slits of faded gray. "Then come to me," he said slowly. "Meanwhile the success of this investment will place you at the head of the Justifiables. When I'm gone' you'll have my place; you'll have what I never had, a fair deal."

For a few minutes he indulged again in entirely human reminiscences of the fortune that seemed always to have just eluded him. He referred frequently to Baxter, always with admiration.

"And what an exit he made! Peaceful in a private room of a hospital, paid for out of his own earnings, true to his philosophy. If I can die like that when my time comes—but not now, not yet," he broke off with sudden energy.

He straightened up with the air of a soldier at command and exclaimed, "Now we must get to work!"

Olmstead almost bowled him over again with his next words.

"The Count has escaped," he announced.

"What, you haven't landed him?" Hackett's eyes narrowed, his lips curled into an ugly smile.

"No, but I will," declared the young man with a glance of steel.

"By God, you are my son!" Hackett's look slowly turned to one of admiration.

"Well, I've learned to keep my own counsel."

"What happened? What happened?" asked Hackett nervously.

"We met, as you've heard, at Gatti's. He told me he had inserted that advertisement with his last penny. He hasn't a cent in the world, yet he balked from a sense of honor. Think of it! I tell you it was magnificent!" Olmstead's voice rang with enthusiasm while Hackett grunted with something more than contempt. It was just such appreciation, such weakness as this that he was always afraid of.

The young man went on. "He was real, genuine, I've never talked to a man like that, never!"

"Let's get to the point," growled Hackett.

"He looked at me critically, from the viewpoint of his world; I felt it—a look that scrutinized my clothes, my manners, my language."

"What's the matter with them? Anything wrong?" Hackett's tone was a challenge.

"I seemed to pass muster," said the young man with a certain pride, "and yet at the end of his inspection, he expressed surprise that I should want to get into society. I had to account for it, and so I gave him the story of a beautiful girl who had attracted me in the opera house. He understood, sympathized and asked who she was. I became bold."

Hackett leaned towards him eager for the end.

"Remembering that you had said it was necessary to get into the Dunstan house," the young man went

on, "I told him I had fallen in love with the daughter, and thought to let it go at that."

"Does he know her?"

"Does he?" echoed Olmstead. "I asked him, and somehow missed the way he said 'yes,' for on top of it I cried out like a fool, 'Then our contract must hold her name; I must meet her!' And on that he jumped to his feet exclaiming 'Never!' Poor as a beggar, not enough money to pay for a meal—It was magnificent!"

"Go on, go on," urged Hackett.

"He quickly threw at me, with great excitement, words that said it was not to be considered, that all was over between us, and then some French exclamations among which I caught the name of Dunstan. 'That name is sacred to me,' he cried. 'To sell an introduction to that lady——' I tried to answer, to argue, but he had gone. I followed, but he had disappeared."

"Well, what next? How are you going to get him?"

"I don't know how; I only know I'm going to—somehow!"

Hackett sat silent as though waiting to hear more.

"He's terribly poor," Olmstead observed slowly.

"And so I shall land him," he added, after a moment, in a tone absolutely positive.

"Where does he live?" asked the other quickly.

"I don't know; but we met at Gatti's by his appointment. They know him there."

"Mmmm—the proprietor Italian?"

"Yes; with your Italian I thought——"

"There's some still left!"

A look that flashed understanding passed between the two men as they reached for their hats.

Scarcely a quarter of an hour later they entered on the East Side below Union Square, a little Italian restaurant where the linen was scarce and the crockery heavy, where the floor was sprinkled with sawdust and strewn with little light wooden three-legged marble-top tables, wherever they came from. All around the room they stood against a dado made of bright red calico, Turkey-red they call it, but it gave the place an air and an individuality, a flavor all its own. The Padrone himself, with thick, bushy gray hair, in a suit of white linen—Sunday was its whitest day, but that might happen in any well regulated family, foreign or American—with a sash around his wide girth, of crimson serge brilliant as the curtains, received you, unless he was asleep as now.

It was five o'clock of a winter's afternoon. Behind a longish wicker table on which were spread various brands of tobacco made up into cigarettes and cigars, the Padrone nodded. He had selected a high stool, obviously with the intention to keep awake. In spite of this he nodded. On his shoulder perched a sleepy green parrot, an unobservant parrot, that didn't even emit a squawk at sight of customers at so unusual an hour in the afternoon. A big grey cat walked lazily across the room and jumped softly on his knee.

The two guests took seats under a portrait of Garibaldi, magnificently endowed with a thick black beard and a pair of fierce black eyes, in a red shirt, scowling above a huge muffler. All about the statesman on yellow walls the grandeur of Italy was pictured in primary colors. In a vivid shade of pink rose Mount Vesuvius, heedlessly overrun by a party of tourists testing the newly built funicula. No wonder Garibaldi scowled.

But all this was before a party of jolly New Yorkers discovered it. The scowling Garibaldi, they declared, was just "too lovely." The cat arched her back and hissed, and they called her, "a dear." The parrot blasphemed, and they pronounced her in high nasal tones, "wonderful!" Maddelina, gowned in a medley of clashing colors, was "a darling!" She cooked her omelette over a kerosene lamp and they paid double for it, and gave the baby money besides. Then they had an idea—"positively brilliant," they proclaimed it. They issued invitations for a Bohemian party, invitations with a yellow parrot in one corner, and "Gatti's," lettered in black, coming out of his mouth!

After this the Padrone cleaned up. He gave to Maddelina an American shirtwaist, he clothed himself in respectable black, he bought a new yellow shiny wood sideboard. And so faded the glory that once was Gatti's. Gone is the sawdust, gone are the rickety tables, gone is the kerosene stove. On the floor is an American carpet in dull browns, advised by an American clerk as practical.

The Padrone blinked at his guests without stirring. At five in the afternoon no one comes to order a substantial meal. He touched with a sleepy hand a bell on the counter before him, and went on nodding. The woman with Italian eyes and a child clinging to her skirts, came at the summons.

The men smiled at her, particularly the younger, who wanted the best of her chickens and other things to go with them, ending with a cup of her wonderful coffee. Ah, did she remember him? No? But the Padrone would. And he it was who must give him some more of that most excellent wine that

Monsieur Alain had recommended! Monsieur Alain—did she know him?

Did she? At the name she gave one quick glance at the young man and toddled over to her sleeping lord. Whatever it was she whispered it woke him. He slid off his stool, threw the parrot from his shoulder and hurried across the room. There Hackett spoke to him gently in his own tongue while Olmstead repeated again boldly the name of Monsieur Alain. At mention of it the Padrone burst into an oath, an Italian oath which Hackett met with another.

"Ah, my friend, let me tell you that we too," he nodded sympathetically.

"What, you know?"

"But my friend here——"

So they talked in unfinished sentences, the Padrone growing more and more confidential and the two guests more and more sympathetic, till the Padrone came out with his prime grievance. This Monsieur Alain owed to Gatti's money for meals, a great many meals. He owed to his landlady for his room, since many weeks; oh the Padrone knew her very well. He owed to everyone, to the washerwoman at the Crescent Laundry in the basement over the way; to the stationer below; to the shoemaker next door; to the grocer at the corner. "No wonder he never go out till night; no wonder he stay in his room all day!"

"But is he so poor?" Olmstead asked with peculiar emphasis.

"Is he? You ask 'is he?'" The Padrone gasped at the question, and Hackett threw the next card. He explained in the Italian of the streets, dear to the Padrone's ears, just what his friend meant. And then Olmstead after some hesitation, acknowledged he had

a confidence to make, and, after more hesitation, advice to give, such excellent advice indeed that he was soon entirely satisfied that he had arranged a scheme that could not fail to enmesh the poverty-stricken Count.

"You know these Frenchmen," said Olmstead at last, pushing back his chair and shrugging his shoulders. "I have told you what I myself have learned."

He reached for his hat while Hackett paid the bill. There followed a moment or two of reflective silence, then the Padrone observed gravely. "At three tomorrow."

"At three," echoed Hackett.

"Of course you will not mention us," said Olmstead. Hackett explained why, and the Padrone assured them he understood.

"By the way, is it good—this laundry—the Crescent?" Olmstead asked at the door.

"Oh, but yes; you tell her I send you."

"Of course," he answered, smiling.

Followed by his friend he crossed the street. There he raised his hat to the watching Maddelina, and disappeared into the Crescent Laundry.

CHAPTER IV

NOBLESSE *oblige!*

When the Frenchman had indignantly left Olmstead he believed himself in earnest. He had acknowledged that he was the Comte André St. Alain de Guitry, and it had seemed to him imperative upon his title to repulse any temptation to use Miss Dunstan as a means to financial aid. He had been really in earnest, and as independent as a man may be who has another card up his sleeve. He had not only his point of honor to maintain, but another appointment to keep, another applicant in view who, though signing only initials, promised after some correspondence to turn out as well as this Mr. Olmstead. He had left him to go to a rendezvous with the initials at a private hotel. How should he dream it would be a girl, unchaperoned, who would receive him in a public salon?

An unheard of adventure, it seemed to him now, as he sat in his hall bedroom recalling it. She had recalled it too in the office of a newspaper, speaking of him as her "story." In a reporter's own way she told how he had fallen down.

Asked if he seemed genuine she had answered: "No, oh no, I reckon he's what we call a fake. A foreigner of course, and he didn't expect to see a woman; and

the public parlor frightened him; and he asked if I had a chaperon and then——”

“Never mind details.”

She was young, and new, and eager to explain. But editors in newspaper offices deal only with results thereby often missing the real story.

“Too bad you didn’t pull it off,” he said, “suppose you keep an eye on him.”

“Keep an eye on him! How on earth does one do it?”

But she didn’t say it aloud. New and young as she was, she had learned a few things since she came to New York, from her native town in Virginia, to make money enough to retire, and collect plots enough to write books that would be called works. She had learned never to ask a question, and never to appear to consider any assignment impossible.

“Keep an eye on him.”

And the young man in possession of the city desk, dropped it just as nonchalantly as he stooped to pick up the pencil, blue, that had slipped from his hand.

In his little back room at Madame de Frontenac’s “her story” was, meanwhile, sunk in despair. His black coat, a little shiny at the elbows and worn at the collar, was buttoned close up to his neck. He had not the look of a man either happy or hopeful, though, as we know, he had kept inviolate his point of honor. He had kept also the notes signed John Burr Olmstead, much as a woman keeps her love letters even after she has rejected the man who wrote them.

The personality of Olmstead rose before him. In that dingy little restaurant known as Gatti’s, where the Count had gone for his dinners without the money to pay for them, he had been most agreeably impressed

by his correspondent. He wondered if he had not been perhaps too hasty, perhaps he should have temporized and heard him to the end——

Suddenly he started and gripped the sides of his chair. In that room where nothing agreeable had ever happened to him, Guitry remained silent. Someone had knocked at the door softly. In the list of visitors who might seek him were those whom he did not care to see. Who else should know where he was? He remained silent and waited for the footsteps to recede. Instead, fell the knocking again, this time more insistent, a trifle louder. He glanced at the door nervously, and wished he had had the discretion to lock it. Too late! The handle turned. Guitry arose indignantly to be confronted by Jack Olmstead.

"I was afraid I shouldn't find you," he cried at the threshold.

"Monsieur!"

"You left me so abruptly the other day, before we had completed our arrangements," he added quite naturally. "I offended you; I am here to apologize, and to begin again."

And with what kindness he made the approach! He appeared not to notice the smallness of the iron bed, the faded red carpet, the uneasiness of the host.

Big, handsome, well dressed, amiable, he advanced into the room with his overcoat on his arm and his hat in his hand. So he had accomplished the first step, and when he took the second he seated himself opposite the Count on the end of the bed. He sat there as easily as though he were in a cushioned armchair.

"Now Monsieur, now that you see me in my home," said Guitry bitterly, speaking in perfectly correct English with only the very slightest accent, "you will

doubtless understand better the reason for my advertisement."

"Why, of course," Olmstead answered promptly.

"I was driven to it," Guitry acknowledged with shame.

"So I judged," said his visitor with a fine smile.

Then he added reflectively, "Monsieur, it is a business like any other." With that he paused. And again the Frenchman it was who took the initiative.

"Before we enter into negotiations it is best that we confide in each other," he said and paused again.

Olmstead waited holding himself well in hand, with the air of one who could wait indefinitely. This appearance of ease or indifference was cultivated with a purpose, cultivated in deference to the people who judge the inner man by his outward signs. Having made up his mind that a great many such beliefs were mere superstitions, founded mainly, perhaps, on some physical weakness—the subject's lack of muscular power or nerve control—he went to work to circumvent them. His gaze for instance was perfectly direct, the gaze commonly attributed to only an honest person; his exterior was most calm, that of any highbred man accustomed to social intercourse; he was never nervous or shiftily or restless. Also he was never himself, never off his guard as every day, ordinary, good people may be—spontaneously, unaffectedly, without, as the Count would have said, "*arrière pensée*." He did things as he realized the advisability of doing them, which was one of the deplorable things of a deplorable career. Naturally—well who can say what he would have been naturally, if, for instance, he had had like so many people a pair of commonplace, respectable parents?

Monsieur de Guitry resumed uneasily, "Indeed, I realize that it is necessary for you, at least, to have confidence in me, in my credentials, in my position. I have confided to you who I am, and as you have learned from our correspondence, I am at present in New York, incognito." He said the word slowly, delivering it with an accent of importance. "I do not wish to be seen by my world," he added with a touch of pride, "for to be seen would be to be recognized."

"Quite so," Olmstead vouchsafed.

A long pause. Then Guitry ventured "And you, Monsieur?"

"My name is Olmstead, John Burr Olmstead; I have nothing to disguise in that." It was almost a reproach.

Guitry flushed as he said, "I take it you are unknown."

"Comparatively, at least in this country."

"Ah——"

"I am from Australia, from the mines."

"*Bon!* At least you have never been in the wrong set!"

"I have only a few acquaintances in New York, business men," said Olmstead, "no one of importance, otherwise I am a stranger. I assure you I will not be recognized; you shall not be embarrassed."

"*Bon,*" repeated Guitry. "And this desire that you confess to me to enter society arises——" Guitry paused, finding himself on dangerous ground.

"A gnat," said Olmstead, "a gnat flew between us. Let us brush him away."

"Never can I consent to make use of the Dunstan family, from which I have accepted hospitalities," insisted Guitry, uncomfortably.

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it," said

Olmstead with utmost graciousness. "Let's begin afresh. You propose, for a consideration, to introduce someone, worthy the honor, into that society composed of the great, the high, the rich, the mighty, the good. I come to you as a client; but first, am I all right socially?" he questioned gaily. "Do you consider me possible?"

"With time," answered his companion gravely, "with time."

"Time!" echoed Olmstead with his first hint of impatience. "I am here for just a few weeks. It must be done at once. I want my fling now. I want to be able to say I have been in the great world of New York. I must be presented now, this week. I want to meet the men and women who are leaders in society, then I promise you I shall disappear. You will be rid of me."

"Yes, but my dear sir, I must be responsible for the man or woman I introduce to my friends. I must know who he is, I have just seen a young woman, a person of means, but she was a woman alone. I rejected her as impossible."

"Well, am I possible?" asked Olmstead again, crossing his arms over his broad chest and looking out quizzically.

"I like you," said the other simply.

"Oh, that's not what I mean," Olmstead objected with sudden irritation.

"You seem to me a fine type of American, frank when you let yourself go, square, as you say over here. I believe you are big, one can see you have strength and the courage that I lack. I cannot, for example, imagine that you would do anything small. You are

independent. If you had been in my straits I believe you would have pulled out of them—differently.”

André de Guitry broke off suddenly. He jumped to his feet and held up a hand in warning. There was the sound of footsteps outside to which inside he and his visitor listened. They approached, stopped at the door, and then someone rapped and rapped again. The knob rattled roughly, turned suddenly, and the door was thrown open. The secret of the Count St. Alain de Guitry's tightly buttoned coat was revealed at that moment.

A small urchin with a package in his dirty hand, said boldly: “Me mudder she sez as how yez can't have no shirt this week an' I wuzn't ter leave this here wan till yer pays fur them two weeks gone an' more——”

Olmstead thrust his hands into his pockets and crossed to the little window, as though to save his host embarrassment. At the end of the row of shabby high-stooped houses that made of the street a dingy cavern the face of a clock loomed up. It was just a few minutes past three, and the scene he had planned was on. He waited expectant, while behind him the boy with the package was whining out his string of insults. He glanced furtively back into the room to see the effect upon his victim. It was the first time in his career that he had had such a chance. Guitry without a word of protest, but with the look of a man in desperate straits stood fumbling in his pockets, trying to placate the boy with some insufficient change. His face where he stood with the light from the window falling full upon it had paled perceptibly. How thin it was and how aristocratic! Young, too. Olmstead had expected to feel like the small urchin

who pins a ridiculous placard on the respectable elderly gentleman and then hides behind a tree to watch the fun. But somehow this wasn't fun; he felt as if he were a Mephistopheles sending a tortured soul to hell.

Suddenly Guitry's face became crimson and he paused, dumb with amazement, for, following close on the little ruffian's down-trodden heels, on his horrible vulgar words, came a woman, with a child dragging at her skirts and a greasy paper in her hand. It was Maddelina of the eating house. After one quick glance at Olmstead, who had again turned his back to gaze out through the small pane of cloudy glass, she announced that she had come to get the money due to her good man. She overwhelmed the Frenchman with threats. Freely intermingled though they were with Italian exclamations they left no room for doubt as to their meaning. He must pay now, that instant. If he didn't pay then, that instant, she and her good man would summon the righteous law of the country, now, immediately.

In that little room filled with harsh tones and angry gesture Guitry stood, a figure at bay, but dignified, a gentleman to the end. He explained to the excited Maddelina with quite the same courtesy that he might have shown a lady in a drawing-room, that he understood her position, that he was sorry, that he would come himself later to the café, that he would also stop at the laundry. He did not repudiate his debt, he would meet it. He assured her he would present himself at her establishment; he would not deceive her, he would pay.

At the word—"pay"—the small urchin piped up again. "Me mudder she sez——"

Olmstead interrupted suddenly, glad that his cue had come at last. He took the greasy paper from Maddelina's hand. He turned from one to the other. "Such a trifle," he said, "permit me—my good people—" The kind courtliness of his manner as he stood between his host and his creditors, backed by the handful of bills which he pulled from his pocket, commanded attention.

"Now—please—no, I insist——"

The urchin, grasping his payment in one hand, relinquished his package from the other, while Maddelina, no less victorious, presented her respects, and, before she took her departure, expressed the hope that the two gentlemen would do some more honor to the humble establishment of Gatti where they would be forever welcome, etc., etc.

"Honor!" echoed M. de Guity, striding up and down the little room. "How can I hold up my head before you?"

"Nonsense, it is the beginning of our partnership," said Olmstead kindly, closing the door upon the unwelcome guests, and taking possession once more of the end of the bed. "You propose to enter a business career, and at the very threshold you are blinded by a few gnats. My dear Count——"

"Monsieur, I implore you not that name here!" Guity was struggling for composure.

"You are going to resume it," the other assured him calmly. "You must prepare yourself to swallow the camel which, in the career of every business man, looms up sooner or later. It is only by brushing away the gnats that you will have a chance at the camel. Believe me in all business there is a way around; it

is for us to find it. You will introduce me to your world for compensation."

Guitry winced.

"But you draw the line at a Miss Dunstan."

"Forever!"

"Very well, I yield, I yield."

"Ah—" Guitry was beginning to recover himself in the graciousness of his companion. In a brief pause Olmstead considered him smiling. He went on:

"I shall be introduced at once then into the houses of the best, the best."

"Monsieur," said Guitry, stopping him with indescribable pride, "I know no others! You surely must have heard of my father. He was Raymond de Guitry. The American newspapers always referred to him as the nobleman who owned the famous star necklace."

In answer to Olmstead's blank look his host went on to explain. "It was called so because it was formed of seven stars, each star holding a ruby, red as the blood of the unfortunate Queen for whom it was originally made. It bore the mark of the court jeweler, Boehme."

Olmstead listened intently and then observed jocularly, "I guess that was before my time!"

"My father lost that necklace," continued the other sadly.

"Lost it?" echoed Olmstead.

"A dozen years ago he was robbed of it; it was a sort of culmination to our misfortunes. From that moment my father was a changed man, he lost heart."

Olmstead sat silent, gazing ahead of him.

"You see," Guitry went on, "in all his years of great money anxiety, when he had parted with treasure

after treasure, he had kept this one, one of the things he held sacred, so sacred that I believe he would have starved rather than sell it. He died three years after its loss, having spent all that he dared in his search for it."

"And you?"

"I have long since reconciled myself to be without it. I only pray it is in the hands of some one who reveres it as we did."

Olmstead moved uneasily. To hear in those shabby quarters words that expressed only a desire so humane seemed to him unnatural. He felt disturbed, humiliated, then suddenly again resentful.

"You are then a very important person," he resumed, "and I can rely upon it that your introduction will admit me at once into the most exclusive circles." He insisted on that.

"When I told you I was the Count André de Guitry I thought all was said," the other answered simply.

"I had never heard of you," Olmstead observed with a shade of impudence.

Guitry ignored the remark. "Without boast I may say that three years ago I was a figure in the social world of America, courted, fêted. I came over to serve as groomsman to the Duke D'Arencourt, who married one of your heiresses. I had a little money which I believed to be safely invested. While here I had the misfortune to fall deeply, sincerely in love. I disguised it badly, for which I reproach myself bitterly."

"She was poor?"

"Ah, you do ignore things!"

Olmstead reminded him that he had been in Australia for two years.

"Well, then, it was of public interest to the newspapers to announce boldly that I was a suitor for the hand of the daughter of the immensely rich Arpad Dunstan. This man and his lovely wife——"

Olmstead supplied the name, "Mildred."

"I believe she is called so. They, and doubtless their friends, after a misconception which they tell me is universal among American fathers and mothers, jumped at once to the conclusion that I was an adventurer in search of an heiress."

"Did she care for you?"

"Even if she did so honor me I have my pride too. No man's daughter can be my wife without his consent. He need not have feared me."

"That's very fine," said Olmstead.

"Not at all; it is a sort of tradition or superstition. I was brought up with a tremendous respect for parental authority, and I have not lost it though my parent are both dead. You have yours?"

Olmstead ignored the question.

"It is ingrained like a love of beauty," Guitry went on. "After this unfortunate occurrence, America had no longer any attractions for me. I prepared to return to my own country with a sad heart, when suddenly I found myself stranded in this one with only a few dollars in my pocket. The investment in which I believed had turned out a bad one."

"Stranded!" cried Olmstead. "I've been there. It will drive a man to any lengths, eh?"

"It drove me to this," said Guitry bitterly.

"But before, before you came to this?"

"I walked the streets looking for work. One learns the world that way."

"Yes," interposed Olmstead eagerly, a question in his voice.

"I advertised for pupils to learn French. I had one, a boy; he became sick; I had another—ah, well, it was a series of misfortunes. I tried to find on Second avenue someone who wanted to learn fencing."

"You couldn't! Then what?"

"Then I fell to this, a dilettante in an attic! What could be more contemptible! But remember, I was brought up to do nothing." Guitry drew himself up sharply, with dignity. "Monsieur, you now know more about me than anyone living."

Somewhat abruptly Olmstead returned to the proposition before them. "Our negotiations will then go forward at once. We shall live meanwhile, and we shall decide upon a net sum to be paid after we find ourselves launched."

"With that I expect to return to my native country," said Guitry. "Unless——" he paused consciously.

"Unless what?" asked Olmstead.

"This time I enter society a wiser man. It is expected of me to be in search of an heiress. Well, we answer as the world takes us!"

"You are a philosopher," laughed Olmstead. "So you will lay siege again to the heiress, and all your principles will vanish into thin air!"

"Pardon me, the woman I marry will take my title as I take her fortune, without concealment. I return with my eyes open and my heart dead. I have become in your America a business man. You have the first claim upon my title. When it ends there are several women in society who will be quite willing to invest in me."

"What?"

Olmstead was genuinely surprised and apparently also pleased.

"At last," he cried, "a redeeming vice!"

But Guitry looked at him imperturbably, even with hauteur. "As I have told you, I have only my title. I have put it up as merchandise; it is my only asset."

"Do you mean to marry?"

"*Mais oui*, a woman I do not love—a woman with money."

"You would sink to that?" cried Olmstead.

"You do not understand. I shall enter upon this contract as frankly as upon a business proposition. I shall sell her my title for so much of her money. There are several women whom I consider; you will know them, for I shall fulfill my agreement with you."

"They are friends of Miss Dunstan?" asked Olmstead suddenly.

"It is through her that I have met them."

"Then it is possible that I may meet her too, through them," Olmstead suggested easily.

"That may be."

"Even probable, eh? You see—the way around? Olmstead smiled his most captivating smile.

"If in the course of your adventures in the social world," said Guitry, lifting his fine eyebrows, "you happen to meet Miss Dunstan, that I cannot help. You understand my point?"

"Perfectly," Olmstead observed gravely. "And thus we have disposed of the gnat!" He moved his hand as though he were waving away a fly.

"Heaven grant that we may have a chance at the camel!" he added with enthusiasm!

In the next few days while Hackett, sufficiently im-

proved in appearance to warrant his title of "Man of Affairs," was making the necessary arrangements for their suitable installation, Olmstead spent his time between the Count, reassuring him, and the Inner Circle, bolstering them up, blowing his own trumpet loud enough to cloud the judgment of his listeners, loud enough even to deceive himself.

They needn't be afraid of him, he had already passed the critical survey of the Count. He knew how to behave. Hadn't he lived in the best hotels? Hadn't he crossed to Europe and back on the best steamers? Hadn't he read and studied, preparing himself for just this? Wait till he was established and introduced by one who belonged, by an acknowledged aristocrat who would declare him to be everything he should be. He'd be accepted as he was presented, and catalogued accordingly. The thing was to get in. Does one ever look for a criminal at a Fifth avenue reception? Or for any other sort in a jailyard? Around a bar aren't all men drinkers? Apropos to so much philosophy Olmstead had once seen two actors in a little comedy that presented them as guests at an entertainment given to amuse the inmates of an insane asylum. Meeting for the first time in such an environment, each had at once concluded that the other was one of the afflicted. In the long conversation that ensued no suspicion that they were both healthy, normal beings ever entered their minds.

The thing was to get in. Once in, he was prepared to find deception, fraud, cajolery, all the lesser vices exploited as they had always been from the time when Bacon advised Essex—"That Your Lordship should never be without some particulars afoot which you would seem to pursue with earnestness and affection.

and then let them fall, upon taking knowledge of Her Majesty's opposition and dislike"—down to the time when Disraeli called society a hotbed of self-indulgence; down to this time when some scribe dared to say it was "a race bruised of riches that had become cancerous and begun to rot."

The thing was to get in. Meanwhile Guitry was agreeably surprised to find himself installed, a neighbor of Olmstead's, at a fashionable hotel. His pawn-tickets had been redeemed and he was once more in the habiliments of his class, lounging about in the comfort of deep-seated chairs and the luxury of marble columns, even with some money in his pockets. He had gone from poverty to luxury, and he didn't inquire too minutely how it had been accomplished.

Up to the moment that they had entered M. de Guitry's world, through the portals of the great hotel, Olmstead had controlled the situation. Now, at his request, it was the former who commanded and directed. He seemed to know just how to talk to the clerks, with just what degree of familiarity; just what directions to give the bellboys and maids. He had commands for everyone, from the housekeeper to the house valet, commands which seemed somehow to proclaim his aristocracy. Olmstead, to save his life, could think of nothing to ask for but towels and of those there happened to be plenty. Guitry had directions to give of all sorts, directions about messages and notes, cards and visitors. He asked politely to have a large steel engraving, which he pronounced dreadful, removed from his wall. He would so much prefer none. He had a chair changed and a couch moved, he ordered another table and a rest for his portmanteau. It was evident that a personage had arrived, and Olmstead felt

that he must be content to shine only by reflected light.

When they appeared at the dining room door the most famous of the hotel stewards in America recognized and saluted his companion. That nod assured them of a table in spite of the waiting crowd. And Guitry moved to where the choicest were set. At a glance he recognized that the crowd was a provincial one. At the threshold he announced that it was an off night. Before he had crossed the room he had observed that the painted ceiling had toned down beautifully.

Olmstead had asked his companion to order the dinner, and it was a pleasure to hear him. He did it so well, with such ease, taking care not to fall into what he called an American *mélange*. He explained to Olmstead how extraordinary they were, these *mélanges*, to a Frenchman. Wherever, he asked, did they come from? Sausages and caviare, that should be touched one with mustard, the other with red pepper and a dash of lemon, served with syrup and buckwheat cakes! Shades of Vatel, Gouffe and the others! He ordered very little but he insisted that it should be just right, and one knew somehow that he knew.

The Most Important Person in the room took charge of him and showed him all the little attentions that so great a person has at his command. He pulled out his chair himself, handed him a napkin and even gave him a menu. Then he consulted with him in a whisper. Ignoring Olmstead completely, his manner indicated that the special consignment of English sole that had arrived that day, had been imported specially for M. le Comte's consumption. Guitry deferred to his friend of course, but why in thunder did that numbskull of a menial show so plainly that he considered him of no

importance? This worried Olmstead. But he gave no indication of it. He longed to ask for a menu of his own but the words stuck in his throat. He really wanted a glance at the prices. He decided to wait, intending to capture it when it dropped from Guitry's hand. He kept his eye on it, but the Most Important Person in the room was ahead of him. He picked it up immediately, as though it were a jewel too precious for ordinary eyes, and walked off with it. Three times during dinner it was presented to Guitry, and three times it was immediately whisked away. Did that fool of a head waiter think he wanted to steal it? Steal! At the thought Olmstead grew cold. And now suddenly he had a thousand qualms, not of conscience, but of consciousness. His very food embarrassed him. Guitry, sitting opposite in a soft rumpled shirt front, produced, without apparent effort, just the effect that Olmstead, spic and span, had hoped to convey. Was he perhaps too spic and span?

On this eventful night he felt that he had never appeared to worse advantage. He eyed his vis-a-vis furtively, taking comparative note of the stiff expansiveness of his own shirt-front, wondering if his cravat were the approved length, all the while, in spite of his muscular control, conscious of his surroundings, of his hands, of his feet, of the eyes of the multitude of diners—conscious, above all, of the disdainful waiters, hovering about when they needed nothing and disappearing when they needed something. As far as Guitry was concerned they might have been hewn out of the same material as the cupids that danced on their pedestals in the corners of the room. They didn't exist until he wanted their services.

Olmstead went through the dinner with a sense of

irritation although his victim, whom he had started by tolerating, was fast becoming a captivating companion, easy, natural, magnanimous, friendly, amusing, expansive—a man who had grown up in the society of famous people, and who had the grace to assume that they might also have been his companions had he cared to make them so.

Occasionally, very rarely, Guitry resorted to some French word to express his meaning, yet he was French in his feelings, and frequently in his phraseology, French to his heart's core—purposely I refrain from the expression, finger tips. His finely moulded hands were so little in evidence. It was as if he had a contempt for that type of foreigner which generations of actors have adopted as model, the gesticulating, fervid, fervent, frothy, florid, uncontrolled, overemphatic foreigner, waving his hands in the air to express an idea or shrugging his shoulders to reject one. Olmstead sat watching him, contrasting him with Duflon of the Justifiables, Duflon of the yellow frock coat, Duflon of the waxed goatee.

Guitry's humor was of the best. After nights of torture and depression what joy to have escaped from the hideous nightmare of poverty! He was eager to plunge once more into the great world where he belonged, eager, no matter what the difficulties he might encounter by the way, eager, no matter what the burden he might have to carry. He considered his companion with indulgent eyes full of gratitude. Yes, he was fond of him already. The alliance between them, setting them as it were against the world, gave him a sense of great friendliness. What if Olmstead were perhaps a trifle too vivid? He was in any event the man who had saved his life. ~~No matter what the~~

future might hold, for the moment he felt only happiness in his new-found luxury.

Olmstead formed a strange contrast to his smiling companion as he sat beside him glowering, and at the same time intently watchful. If he had been a woman one would have said that something had set his nerves on edge. He was so unaccountably irritated and uneasy. Suddenly and unexpectedly Guitry put his finger on the spot of his irritation.

"Ah, but I am filled with gratitude for you," he whispered. "I owe to you my life!"

It was strange how his companion resented it. "You have nothing to be grateful to me for," he said quickly, almost gruffly. "Remember that, please—please," he repeated impatiently as Guitry protested. "I want that understood from the beginning."

Guitry smiled indulgently, considering Olmstead's resentment as part of his generosity. After dinner, in the crowded corridor, he resumed his office of guide. Passersby doubtless thought them two dear old friends, careless and merry, two young men with plenty of money, so young as not to have a care on earth.

"I ask you have you ever seen in all your travels, and you have as you say knocked about much, such jewels?" Guitry exclaimed, with the proud responsible air that one who acts as a guide naturally assumes. From his enthusiasm he might have owned them.

"It's like a jeweler's window guarded with lights and plate glass," Olmstead muttered sullenly.

An endless chain of people who all seemed prosperous, all decked out in trappings to give the appearance of wealth, passed in and out. Were they all rich? Olmstead wondered. If M. de Guitry had been in his own country he assured him that he would have said

no. For there things reverse themselves, to borrow his expression. The poor it is who keep up appearances, the rich are indifferent to what the public thinks. Their lovely gardens, their beautiful houses hidden behind high walls, attest this. It is the woman who earns her holidays who dresses up in her best and carries a gilt mesh bag, while it is common to find one whose rentals are fabulous going about shabby and unconcerned. In France the Hetty Green of the newspapers would not be an oddity.

In one door and out another expensively dressed women passed with their escorts, women in model gowns, fashioned ridiculously and arbitrarily by French masters, women uncomfortably tightened at the knees, submissively flattened in their corsets, women decreed to cover their ears with hair and their necks with drooping hat gear, uncomfortable, pocketless, chastened.

"And all well off!" said Olmstead.

"*Oui, mon ami*, it is a safe conclusion."

"The revolt will come with suffrage," exclaimed Olmstead. "No self-respecting democrat for instance would ever submit— Lord, she is thin," he broke off suddenly, with his eyes upon the gaunt caricature of a woman who recalled to him the omission of the final letter that had made a certain tombstone famous.

André de Guitry bowed to her as she passed.

"Is she all right, I mean respectable?" asked Olmstead quickly.

"*Mais oui!*"

"How do you know?"

"*Tiens*, one meets her in the best houses."

"And shall I meet her?"

"But of a certainty. She is very simple, very hospitable," continued Guitry; "an absolutely devoted

wife. That is her husband with her, they are both real philanthropists. Come, I will present you."

"No, no, wait!" cried Olmstead.

Guitry recognized some one else, and Olmstead heard again the word philanthropist.

"Look well at this lady coming towards us," his companion was saying presently. "You will meet her many places." He bowed low, and as she passed he said, "She has money and a hobby. It seems she thinks of nothing but to ameliorate the sufferings of animals. And what good she has done!"

Olmstead listened with a mocking smile on his lips. He hadn't read for nothing. Philanthropists indeed! In modern literature people who contributed to church funds and endowed colleges did it to relieve their consciences. People who invaded the slums and went into rescue work did it in order to get themselves talked about. People who enrolled themselves in the service of settlements did it to get into society. He couldn't be expected to have any respect for them—he had read too much. In print he had seen them reviled as hypocrites and humbugs. He could put his hand on the novel that accused them of robbing the unsophisticated to build settlement houses and carved marble altars.

"Good! Good!" mocked Olmstead at last. "Are they all good?"

"*Non, non,*" Guitry protested. "But those whom you will meet are——"

"Rich!" said Olmstead dryly.

"Well, more or less. But there are a dozen sets, some of them conservative, simple, honest aristocrats; others— For instance, at this moment, with that party making their way to the supper room, I see a woman,

a divorcée, who, it is known, has wrecked the peace of many a home just out of wickedness, vanity, a desire for scalps at her belt. That is not a good woman!"

"Ah, that's the sort I want to meet!" cried Olmstead with enthusiasm.

"That woman attracts you?" asked Guitry with surprise.

"Yes, yes, she's flesh and blood, the real thing!"

"Here and there in society you will find that sort," acknowledged the Frenchman.

"Here and there!" echoed Olmstead derisively.

"How about all those women who marry for money? Who deceive their husbands? Who neglect their children? Those who are worse than the women of the streets?"

"Ah, you go too far," Guitry protested.

"The millionaire tempted—that's what I want to see," Olmstead went on boldly.

"You will find many who resist."

"I suppose there are men who are unconscious of any form of hunger," Olmstead replied, "just as there are women who haven't any kind of vanity."

"Heaven forbid!"

And serious conversation was at an end. The talk was of women, lovely, tender women whom Guitry had known, beautiful women with intelligence and good humor, women of the highest class, women who could be friends, sweethearts and wives. "Those are the best women," he cried with enthusiasm, "women who haven't the craze for doing something, anything, so long as it is outside their homes."

Olmstead listened silently to Guitry's praise of them, he who had never known that sort and strangely little of any other sort. The Count had a fund of gossip,

gossip quite different from Hackett's, good natured gossip about famous people—noblemen, scientists, judges, cabinet ministers, military men, musicians, singers, actors.

After some hours of companionship, Guitry found himself unable to relegate Jack Olmstead to any exact place in the social sphere. He had, it is true, the education of a man who had dipped into many books—books from which he seemed to have taken, with strange persistence, always the worst. He had traveled extensively and known many men, but he seemed to have been brought up nowhere in particular and not among particular people. If one may use a significant phrase that suggests lodging houses and transportation cars, he gave the impression of having knocked about so much as to have rubbed off some of his polish. He accounted, however, for the rough edges by his long sojourn in Australian mines.

Walking up Fifth avenue still later that same night, André de Guitry had suddenly a moment of terror.

"I begin once more to see myself from the viewpoint of my world," he remarked.

"You are not going to retreat?" demanded Olmstead with asperity.

"I have accepted your hospitality, Monsieur, I am indebted to you, I shall repay my indebtedness by remaining true to my contract. I will earn my salary," he added bitterly.

Guitry threw back his head and walked erect with his eyes on the stars when, at his side, Olmstead suddenly stumbled over the small ragged figure of a newsboy, who was trying to impede his progress with his wares.

"Extra!" he cried shrilly. "Extra!"

Olmstead walked on but the small figure followed at his heels. "Here," he said at last as a man will pay for freedom, handing out a dime. The boy thrust at him a penny "Extra." Mechanically Olmstead held out a hand for the change that even by the most absent-minded calculation should be his.

"Ain't got no change," whined the small voice at his elbow.

Jack Olmstead came suddenly to a standstill. "Hello there," he said, "hello! I know that game. It's the beginning. Your pocket's full of pennies, I know—it's the beginning—it's the cry of the coward who is up against an unequal game, and doesn't dare to play square."

The boy's eyes grew big as Olmstead caught him by the shoulder.

"Leave me be," he whispered. "I ain't done nothin'."

"That's it, and you don't mean to."

"Me mother's sick——"

"Yes, yes, that's the line. 'An' me father's dead!"

Jack Olmstead said it in perfect imitation of the small urchin shivering in his grasp, or perhaps of another that lived in his memory. He came abruptly back to his own tone. "And you're hungry," he said. "I know the game to the finish, my boy, to the finish. Yet there are people in this town, on this very avenue," he broke out suddenly, "who say they long to do something for such as you. Isn't it a joke, my boy, a silly joke?"

"And you, do you know what you'll do?" he went on rapidly. "You'll work this change game to the end, or till you're big enough to work another. You'll learn others from your kind but more from your empty stomach; it's a great teacher."

"It teaches you first one trick and then another. You're little when you begin, so little that you don't run much danger of being run in. You bank on that. You stand around on the street corners waiting for a guy like me to come along. There are all kinds of ways to work him, God help us, I mean you. Let me look at you!" Jack Olmstead turned the small boy's face around to the lamp-post almost fiercely. "I'm willing to bet," he said, gazing into his eyes intently, "that for three days you won't steal or beg or even lie. Here, here's two dollars. I'll bank on your honesty for as many days," said Jack Olmstead solemnly. "Where do you live?"

"Off Foist avenue down in de alley by de grocer's, by Allen street."

"Who have you got belonging to you?"

"Me aunt."

"Is she good to you?"

The boy hesitated. "She'll be good tonight, boss," he said.

"And tomorrow?"

"An' termorrer, an'——"

"Come to me when she isn't; come to me there at the hotel when you're hungry again."

Olmstead handed the boy a card and dropped him as abruptly as he had picked him up.

"It's hard, damned hard till a youngster gets his bearings," he said shamefacedly.

"It's hard enough for a full grown man," cried Guitry, drawn a thousand times closer to Olmstead in that moment. As they walked away he exclaimed impulsively, "What a heart you have, my friend. What a heart!"

"No, only a sympathetic stomach," answered Olmstead *with a laugh.*

CHAPTER V

MONSIEUR DE GUITRY was once more in a position to be offered those special attentions and privileges accorded by New Yorkers to men of his class. His table was strewn with them. They came from tailors, masseurs and haberdashers who announced themselves, from lower Broadway to upper Fifth avenue, exclusively his. They were wrapped up in circulars from various exclusive publications, offering him the great social advantage of enrolling himself among their list of exclusive subscribers. They were enclosed with bunches of tickets for exclusive entertainments for the benefit of humankind that wasn't exclusive, tickets for himself and his friends, tickets that must be accounted for to unknown secretaries, tickets of special shape and size that wouldn't fit into any envelope ever manufactured for the ordinary uses of any ordinary correspondent.

To one of the uninitiated it might appear that Guitry was peculiarly favored, for in many cases these attentions were duplicated. He had for instance, ten sets of tickets for the same performance, and six books of the "Who's Which" and the "What's What" variety, each one enclosing a quantity of loose sheets marked "Absent 'Americans"; "Distant Dwellers," etc., all to be subscribed for or indefinitely guarded till called for by some special envoy. And then from some mighty

millionaire of the philanthropic persuasion, bursting with energy and ideas, there were seven dolls in seven boxes, naked as the day they were born, sent to be dressed for society's pet fair by Madame de Guitry, care of Monsieur de Guitry.

Oh, yes, by every idiotic sign he was back in the mad world of fashion, not merry, though the words do cling together in the mind in spite of all the philosophers who have been at such pains to prove it a dull world, a sad world, a foolish world, a world full of people not worth speaking to, a world of scatterbrains where we go to get rid of ourselves, a world of ignor-amuses where, in historic phrase, we go to be bored in the companionship of others. Whatever and however and wherever, André de Guitry was back in it.

He was asked to accept a box for a lecture on jeweled toads; he was assured on the coroneted paper of a doubtful Princess whom he had never seen, that he was famous enough to be included among her series of portraits entitled "Men I have dined with." Various are the ways of the social climber! He had cards for Suffragist meetings—the feminists had not yet built those ideal flats where children and cooking are to be equally cooperative; he was invited to consider the prostitute in her relation to the vote; he had cards for opening days and nights of other sorts. Invitations to New York's most important "Art Opening" Guitry threw scornfully to one side—a varnishing day that is for every one is for no one.

"There should be crowds and crowds—one may discriminate, and the crowd at a *Vernissage* should not be the same crowd that besieges a dressmaker's opening." The Frenchman went on to describe a real *Vernissage*, the opening of the only Salon, where the lists are

guarded, where it is an honor to be invited, where one meets connoisseurs and aristocrats.

Finally he picked up a roll of script, sealed with an indigo blue scarab, that announced an Egyptian fête to be given by a rare being, a millionaire who is also an artist. To that Olmstead must be invited. M. de Guitry would arrange for it and some other entertainments at once. He did, and so well that by return post Olmstead found himself, not only invited to the fête, but also to a dinner in the new house of Mrs. Pendleton Cartwright, the widow of a rich Chicago banker. That event marked his real entrance into society.

"A gathering of writers," whispered André de Guitry as he and Olmstead surveyed the scene in the hallway on that important occasion, "with a scattering of artists."

At one end there was a high balcony lit and filled with plants, at the other a short flight of curving steps leading to an oval dining room that looked like an Easter egg—in short it was of that period known as late Ritz-Carlton.

There was nothing genial or homelike about the place, nothing personal or individual, yet for years Mrs. Cartwright had been known as a collector, but a collector of celebrities. She had devoted herself to them persistently, and adroitly, since she had apparently no ambitions or talents of her own to further except the ambition to know them, and the talent to worship them. For years she had fed them bountifully. For years she had insistently murmured the word "genius" in the ears of painters, recognized and unrecognized, of musicians, sung and unsung, of authors, published and unpublished. After all, if she made a mis-

take the aspirant, at least, never held it against her. Some were bound to arrive and presuming on that she had collected her lions. She stood tonight welcoming them and amiably cataloguing them at their own valuation. "Comte André de Guित्रy, head of one of the oldest families in France; Mr. John Burr Olmstead, world renowned mining expert—Australia; Mrs. Ben Allen Schauss, Sultan's portrait—only woman ever admitted to the palace; Miss Daintry, author, most successful romance of the year; famous critic—you must read his reminiscences; our greatest scientist; our most renowned humorist——"

Olmstead hadn't appreciated that his introduction was to plunge him into such a centre until he heard Guित्रy's remark. He heard it with trepidation although not unmixed with a thrill of anticipation. He had always had tremendous respect for everything in print, the sort of childlike belief in its integrity of thought and purpose that so many people have. He stood now reviewing familiar books and pictures, trying to realize that among that throng there were those whose cartoons had incited the Justifiabls, those whose words had inspired them, men of courage, men of principles, men who dared proclaim their convictions, men of sincerity and strength, men who would give their lives rather than alter a comma! Oh he had studied the stylists a bit even if— He felt suddenly depressed and uneasy with a sense that this was not the world that he had schemed for, paid for, not the world of extravagance and deceit, not the money making world, hotbed of wicked bribe givers and bribe takers who would barter their souls for gold. With distinct annoyance he decided that he must be more *careful* where his guide led him in the future. Fol-

lowers of Addison, Johnson, Coleridge, Macaulay! He was thrilled, of course, and, since it had happened so, there was nothing to do but to make the best of it and enjoy it. Finally he resolved for this once, at least, to resist all the temptations of his calling and yield himself fully to the pleasure of the entertainment.

From a little knot of people just behind where he stood some isolated sentences floated out to him.

"I don't see anything to write! If I did I could write it!"

"Cold as an Esquimaux hell—good, eh? My latest!"

"The long arm of improbability, I called it——"

The literary evening had begun. They passed from the hall to a large room with high paneled walls of white wood outlined with gold into a series of squares and oblongs, widened at regular intervals sufficiently to admit of a spreading gilded electric fixture. Chairs and sofas of red velvet were pushed stiffly back out of the way leaving ample room for the guests. Olmstead noted a Romney portrait over the mantel. Below it stood two vases, priceless, exact duplicates of each other. His eyes wandered back to the hall, to his hostess resplendent with jewels, when Guitry's voice recalled him, presenting the well known mural painter with the eyebrows that bristle like transplanted toothbrushes, and the hair that looks like whipped cream.

"Ugh, the new drawing room!" the big man grunted out at his side.

Olmstead fluttered genially and answered, "You don't say?"

"Yes; what do you think of it? I ask you."

This to him! Olmstead couldn't imagine why he had been singled out for an opinion, and then he

found he hadn't, for the man resumed, "Bare, disgracefully bare I call it—ugh!"

With his hands thrust deep in his pockets he looked about unreservedly, making his remarks in a quite audible voice, apparently so much at home that Olmstead guessed him to be a member of the household. In order to say something he at last ventured timidly: "As it's new, perhaps she hasn't had time——"

But the big man was shaking his head ominously and sniffing the air.

"Paneled! What do you think of it? Paneled," he sputtered out at last.

"A Period room," Olmstead observed learnedly, echoing a phrase of Guitry's.

"By heaven, yes, a stop to all inspiration," the painter whispered. "A full stop! In the hall tapestries! In the library books to the ceiling! Not a spot to hang a painting! And she used to be a patron of the Arts!"

Waiters handing platters of dainty relishes, followed by waiters with cocktails, came between them. And Olmstead fell to earth with a thud. Alas, that this should be his first encounter with one of that sacred band who may talk of art for art's sake! But the Count found Olmstead smiling in high good humor, when he returned to his side.

"That person just coming in through the doorway is Marsh—Whitfield Marsh," he told him.

Olmstead had never even heard of Whitfield Marsh, but he had a nice wholesome look. He was small yet strongly built, with clear eyes, thick dark hair and a clean shaven face.

"An author?" he asked with some excitement.

At this Guitry hesitated as though to find just the

right word to describe him. He spoke of him as an author and then changed it to reviewer. He called him a playwright and then—well the sum and substance of it all was that Whitfield Marsh had never had a play produced or a book published.

"He is a critic; you must meet him; he knows all these people much better than I do," said Guitry.

That was the significant point for Olmstead, who was eagerly scanning the faces about him, wondering who was famous and who wasn't. To him they all looked equally important. Even this Marsh, who was now smiling upon him and asking, as Guitry left them for another group; "What sort of a crowd is it?"

"Oh, very brilliant," Olmstead blurted out.

"Brilliant!" the man echoed.

"Why, yes."

"Any one said anything?" Then without waiting for an answer the critic repeated again, "Brilliant?"

"Well, you see, I'm not literary," Olmstead ventured timidly.

"Of course, I see it," assented the other, but he seemed to think none the less of him. In fact he paused now and leaned up beside him.

"But I've the greatest respect for you inspired ones," Olmstead hastened to add.

"Inspired! That's good!" Marsh laughed as though his companion had said something really funny. Then he went on to tell him that inspiration meant only one thing nowadays. In the description he fairly rattled out the word money—money—money—and he ended with, "Whoever gets the most is the most inspired."

"But in this set!"

"Set? Humbug! We have to live!"

That had a good old-fashioned familiar ring to Olmstead's ears. So they used it in literary circles, too! Meanwhile Marsh was holding forth about the inspired—Marsh always held forth; that was his idea of conversation.

"Havens, the illustrator and poet, is reputed to be one of the inspired—he did that 'Close-to-the-Ground' stuff." And chuckling, Marsh told Olmstead the story of the rhinoceros picture, his eyes almost disappearing with the memory of it.

"Originally the animal had two horns, but when you saw it it had only one." Olmstead had never seen it, but that didn't make any difference; Marsh went on: "Know why? Because he was only paid for one. He sold it over the bargain counter of a magazine. Editor man offered him half what he asked, so Havens rubbed out one horn! Clever, eh? Two horns, two hundred dollars; one horn, one hundred!"

Marsh settled down next to Olmstead; he thought him one of the most agreeable men he had ever met, extraordinarily clever and responsive. He said, afterwards, that he was brilliant.

"I was green once, myself," Marsh resumed. "And full of that splendid enthusiasm that belongs to literary endeavor. I had just written one of those ringing editorials inveighing against the brutality of the Russians. Someone whispered in my ear that the Managing Editor was in love with a Russian girl. What of it? Well, this—I just drew my pen through the word Russian and substituted Turk. We have to live, eh?"

"Surely," assented Olmstead, feeling himself more at home every minute.

"The thing is for you fellows to know how to read,

then you won't be disappointed. If it's a newspaper, read the ads first."

They were interrupted just here, and Marsh turned to congratulate a man, standing in the centre of a group near them, whom everyone seemed to be congratulating. Olmstead saw, with some satisfaction, that the man's cravat, which was a trifle to one side, and, which like everything else about him, seemed to be thrown on in haste, was ready made and fastened with a snapper. He observed that his coat needed pressing as much as his hair needed brushing. And he had on Congress gaiters; yes, actually, covering a flat unaristocratic foot, long and straight, without any instep.

Marsh whispered into his ear that the man was Brightman. "Another of the inspired," he explained.

Olmstead echoed the name with admiration. In a quick flash he recalled, in a familiar smoky atmosphere, a black frame holding the famous series entitled—"The Man That Pulls the Strings?"

The unpressed clothes, the rumpled hair, the ready-made tie, all had for him now a special significance. He understood now that he was looking at one of those really artistic chaps. Olmstead had heard of them so often, the kind that are too absorbed in work to think about clothes or money, the absent-minded sort whom someone always treats, so absent-minded as to be ignorant even of that.

Oh, it was good to be alive! Olmstead forgot all else when he realized that he had been taken into the group that included Brightman. He leaned forward and grasped the artist's hand. He tried to express as best he could, with real enthusiasm, how much his cartoons had meant to him and his friends. He even got in something about Brightman's honesty of pur-

pose, a man with the courage of his convictions! He liked the sound of that phrase and repeated it. And then, suddenly, he came to himself. He noticed an awkward pause. Brightman laughed disagreeably, nodded and walked away. Marsh chuckled quite as disagreeably, while Olmstead stood awkwardly, wondering what was wrong. Presently one of the group explained, and then another supplemented, and from them all he gathered that he'd have known, if he had seen the "Evening Star," that Brightman was now on the other side, the capitalist's side. "Oh, yes, he was well paid for it, paid to be as eloquent about his nobility as he once was about his guilt. It all depends upon who hires you."

"But his convictions?" Olmstead blurted out the question, while somewhere in the back of his brain there lurked a couplet—this: "*He held his pen in trust, not serving shame or lust.*" He had a memory for rhymes though he never knew who wrote them. He repeated the couplet aloud to Marsh.

"Oh, yes, Austin Dobson—a rhymster, very clever—but a rhymster!" Marsh dismissed him with a wave of the hand.

"Nothing will hamper a literary man more than convictions," he explained, "except ideals. There's Laidlaw over there—ask him if you don't believe me. He's one of the latest recruits to the belief that whatever the public wants, is literature. And the publishers at last recognize his genius; they publish him among the tooth-brush and stove-polish ads. It's the highest compliment a magazine can pay; his stuff advertises the ads. Now, suppose you had ideals— Good God, you'd starve!"

"Oh, don't disturb yourself," laughed Olmstead, "I

haven't any." And later he proved it to his own satisfaction, and still later, to the satisfaction of that band of men who, frankly, had none, either.

The group separated and Olmstead, now much less conscious of his moral unfitness, found himself able to look about and note certain details which he had so far neglected. But he had only time for a quick survey when Guitry was back at his side, announcing to him almost triumphantly that he was to take a Mrs. Cauldwell in to dinner. He was only able to add in quick explanation that she was a most superior person, and very well connected.

Olmstead could detect at a glance her superiority, also that she was not over-young. She had clear blue eyes, fluffy light hair, just touched with gray, a nose that was disdainful whatever her mood, or whoever the man who might be detailed to escort her in to dinner. He walked beside her, gathering consolation from that.

"I suppose you know all these celebrities," he ventured as they took their seats.

"All?" she lifted eyebrows that accentuated the characteristic of her nose. "There are only three of us here," she remarked loftily.

"Oh do you—are you—?" he stammered.

She looked at him. "I'm Mrs. Cauldwell—Mrs. Selby Cauldwell," she replied, lifting her eyebrows so high that they disappeared under her hair.

He quailed, and sputtered out "Oh yes—yes—I didn't catch the name—I——"

He knew her work, though. She was one of the most famous of psychological novelists—ingrowing sentences and disappearing meanings in every paragraph. Oh yes, he knew it! He remembered certain

pages of analysis where he had pencilled, "Here I fell asleep." He tried to think of some intelligent and complimentary remark and suddenly became tongue-tied, swept by a new and fearful thought, as he sat there surrounded by writers, artists, scientists, experts. What if these clever people, people who spent their lives analyzing, diagnosing, dissecting, people accustomed to investing the simplest gestures with most intricate intentions, the baldest statements with most subtle meanings—what if they should see through him, detect that he didn't belong and denounce him to his hostess! Hadn't one of them, just by a quirk of the smallest finger of the right hand, penetrated the fraud in a bit of marble! And taking a fine old head by its ears, a painting that had given pleasure to thousands of ignoramuses—hadn't that same connoisseur, piercing the dirt of ages, labelled it a fake Valasquez? Could anything be hidden from them? He trembled under the thin cover of his flesh, and thought uneasily of the French naturalist who, from a mere scattering of bones, had reconstructed a complete prehistoric animal.

He was afraid to speak lest Mrs. Cauldwell should analyze the tone of his voice. It seemed to him an ordinary voice enough, but to her—he sat silent. And became painfully conscious of his hands—speaking hands! Well, if his spoke—Good God, what might they not reveal? He hid them under his napkin and kept on silent. And all at once, to his greater discomfort, he remembered a page of hers, a page of fine print—the actual look of it flashed before his eyes, a page that described the way a man paused, a different pause from the pause of any other man, a guilty pause. Yes, she had called it guilty. She always wrote quite freely of discriminating pauses, disconcerting pauses, discreet pauses. He wondered what a guilty pause was like.

He tugged at his little moustache and glanced covertly at Mrs. Cauldwell to discover that she was examining the guests around the table, one by one, intently through a lorgnon. What if she should turn the lenses, they were big and round, upon him? Still looking at the others she murmured, "I wish they would label these people!"

"You?" he exclaimed.

"Well, I'm not interested in them," she answered slowly, "only one doesn't want to bother with them till one knows who they are. And then when they're nobody—there are so many of those—one regrets the waste of time. And do you write?" she asked, turning her lorgnon full upon him. Under her cold, clear, penetrating gaze, now magnified to greater clearness and penetration, his eyes fell.

"I?" he blurted out. "No——"

"And what do you do?" she asked condescendingly.

"Do?" he repeated after her, and he looked up to catch her glancing at his name card.

"You're just here to see the animals feed," she remarked, putting him quite unconsciously once again at his ease. "It must be interesting for you," she observed in her most lofty tone. With that she turned her back upon him.

At the same moment he became conscious that the young woman on his other side, who for aught he knew might be reveling in the royalties of her twentieth edition, was speaking to him. By her card she was Miss Ethel Blair. He had another spasm of nervousness. For a second he was almost overcome by it. Then to his rescue came the consciousness of his pressing need of social success. He must come out of the ordeal triumphant; society was after all an affair prin-

cipally of women. And here he was between two of them—two opportunities to try his skill; what he needed was practice. He braced up and, glancing at the lady on his left for the first time, discovered that she was pretty and young. Her hair was brown, glossy, thick, and arranged in a simple old fashioned way that quite disregarded the fleeting earless era; perhaps because her ears were so tiny, and so pink; her neck below them was round and soft and white. She was all curves and smiles, with roses beaming in her smooth cheeks to belie a certain wan look in her gray eyes. She fluttered with enthusiasm and exclaimed: "Isn't it a wonderful evening? Celebrities to the right of us—celebrities to the left of us——"

"Are there really so many?" Olmstead managed to ask.

She whispered the name of a famous humorist in his ear; "There on the right," she explained. "And to the left——" she catalogued another familiar name.

He nodded and observed somewhat loftily, "You see this isn't exactly my set."

"Oh, but it's the best, in the world," his companion cried, almost with reverence.

In view of much that he had learned, Olmstead found himself smiling cynically as he looked over at a very serious, slender, bald-headed man who seemed absorbed in trying to keep his soup out of the way of his straggling moustache. Meanwhile the girl chattered on about the guests and the table decorations and the beauty of the house, giving not the slightest sign of noticing that he was silent or unresponsive.

"Opposite Mr. Whitfield Marsh is Mr. Ball the playwright," he heard her say at last. "And next to him"—she whispered Mrs. Cauldwell's name. "Oh you

know!" she broke off with an enchanting smile. "Isn't it an interesting evening?"

"It's becoming so," said Olmstead with unmistakable meaning. Indeed she was putting him at his ease!

"Oh but I'm glad to be here!" cried the girl, with glowing eyes.

Olmstead glanced at her again. She was really very pretty, and she seemed to like him. "So am I," he made answer truly, for he was delighted—with himself.

They both looked down the long table. One prize guest was deeply engaged in trying to balance one wine glass on top of another. It wasn't as dangerous as it might seem because the glasses were not even wet with wine. The playwright was busy making multitudinous bread balls around his plate that probably represented to him the *dramatis personae* of some scene. Olmstead was surprised not to hear more of a buzz of conversation in such a centre, among such people. There seemed to be no intimacy, no gaiety, no spontaneity. Perhaps they were reserving themselves.

"Just think of being at the table with them!" whispered the girl.

"Do you think it's better than reading them?" he asked quite in her tone.

"Well, it's something to meet them," she insisted. "Oh, look!"

He followed her eyes. One had a dyspeptic skin and wore spectacles; the other was completely bald and—well, Olmstead saw that he did have a firm hand, for he had succeeded in balancing one of the glasses.

"See, they're standing!" someone remarked with enthusiasm.

Olmstead turned to Miss Blair. "Shall we try it?" he asked, picking up a glass in his long firm fingers.

"Oh no," she whispered with a delightful giggle, "we might succeed."

This girl was certainly a brick. She took him just the right way. He wondered if she was literary, and decided she wasn't; she was too enthusiastic about those who were. Perhaps she did nothing, just lived at home and went to parties. He had never met a girl of that sort. He looked at her hands, soft, delicate, slender, with dimpled knuckles; her chin, small and rounded; her broad smooth forehead. She was very attractive in a simple gown, blue, and around her neck a row of pearls. In spite of them Olmstead's eyes traveled above them and rested on her face.

"Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"Another celebrity?" he asked gleefully.

The girl flushed crimson, then she sank back and answered feebly, "No."

The color died out of her face. He was no psychologist, but the sudden transformation from her late enthusiasm had been unmistakable. What on earth had happened? He looked down the long table and caught a reassuring smile from Guitry, where he sat on the right of the hostess. He looked back at the girl, but she had apparently recovered herself, she was listening to some remark from her companion on the other side.

Olmstead had a sudden inspiration, and addressed himself to Mrs. Cauldwell.

"Help me," he said, "to fathom the mystery of this young lady on my right."

"Mystery?"

"She's southern, very enthusiastic about you all, evidently a great reader. Is she a writer?"

"If you know her name perhaps I can tell you," said Mrs. Cauldwell with condescension.

He repeated it softly.

Mrs. Cauldwell shook her head. "I never heard it," she announced stiffly. "She's surely not any one important."

"She may become so," he ventured.

"I'm not interested in people in the process of making." With that she turned her back again.

And presently he was gazing at Miss Blair's white shoulders, at the lovely line where the neck joined the head, at the string of pearls. The girl turned under his gaze. "Do you suppose," she asked suddenly "that person on the right is an author, that foreign looking man—yes, that one—oh do you know him?"

"Of course I know him," said Olmstead proudly. "He's Monsieur de Guitry, the Count André de Guitry."

"Your set," the girl observed with what seemed to him a suspicion of contempt. Then she said coolly, "I prefer this one."

"I suppose you know all the authors," he said.

"Oh, just by sight and by reading them; I read everything—I——" She gave him a quick look and paused abruptly.

"Go on," he said.

"That's all," she answered. "And you?"

"Oh, I'm just—just——"

Suddenly, and he didn't know why himself, he hesitated. They both laughed.

Then the girl exclaimed, "Oh, I know—I know!

You're horribly rich, a millionaire. Everyone wants to know you; you're clever. Even Mr. Whitfield Marsh enjoyed talking to you."

"How do you know I'm a millionaire?" he asked.

"Oh I'm a psychologist," she answered tossing her head.

"Then go on——"

"Well, you're independent," she added quickly. "I like you for that."

"Independent— Why?"

"Because you're talking to me when on the other side of you is a celebrity."

"But she's not interesting," he observed with unmistakable emphasis. And then asked abruptly: "But you—why don't you trust people?"

"How do you know that I don't?"

He smiled and said, "Oh, I'm a psychologist too!" Then he went on, "And you're not an author because authors don't look like you. They have lines in their faces——"

"Not when they're young," she interrupted.

"Oh yes, lines of care. Then their hands are smeary with ink."

"Not nowadays," she said with superiority; "they typewrite!" At that they both laughed again.

"Their hands are not dimpled," he dared.

She thrust hers quickly out of sight and asked, "Why don't I trust people?"

"You won't like me to tell you because, to disclose that, I shall be obliged to make another personal observation."

"Tell me——" she insisted.

"Well then—you wear imitation pearls."

She looked at him in wonder.

"Yes," he went on, "they're very good of their kind, but at home in a boudoir that's all done up in lace and satin, where there are maids at your beck and call, and a butler at your front door, in a safe that's hidden behind a bit of tapestry—somewhere—are the real ones."

"What an idea!" But the picture evidently pleased her.

"Oh no, you don't do anything; you've always been protected."

"How did you discover that?"

"Oh, perfectly simple." If you had ever been up against it, as we men say, you'd look different, and you'd have lost your freshness, and you wouldn't be as enthusiastic about people as you are."

"What else?" she asked softly.

"You have no axes to grind; you're just out for a good time; you like people for what they are."

"So do you!"

"I?"

"Yes; you have the qualities of a man who has really succeeded—independence and courage and honesty; you don't find them often——" she paused a little embarrassed at her enthusiasm, and turned away.

Olmstead was left to his own devices. He pricked up his ears and sat listening.

But no one seemed to advance anything worth while except the waiters. Deftly and imperturbably they removed one course to make way for another.

The salad was handed to the lady on Olmstead's right, and she turned towards him.

"Not a very brilliant dinner, is it?" he observed calmly.

"Oh, you must remember we've proved our cleverness," she answered with marked superiority.

"So it's up to us to prove ours," he retorted amiably.

She shrugged her shoulders, and looked at him in doubt.

"No wonder it's a trifle dull," Olmstead said after a pause. "They who can talk and don't, and we who don't because we can't."

Miss Blair caught this and turned back to him with a delightfully appreciative giggle.

"You're disappointed," she said.

"Well yes, though it's just as well," he answered slowly. "I expected to feel rather out of it when you all began."

"Began?"

"Yes; to exercise your wits, to throw the ball back and forth. I wonder if I'd ever have had the courage to catch it!"

"You would; I'm sure of it!"

Again she realized the enthusiasm of her tone, and again broke off with a flood of color in her cheeks. But he had realized it too. It gave him courage to say: "You're the first woman I've met in society with whom I felt at ease."

She smiled happily. He would have been stupid not to see she liked him. He must see her again! The moments were passing and the dinner was moving rapidly to the period of liqueurs and cigarettes. They talked in desultory fashion, but, try as he would, he couldn't bring her to the point of asking him to call. She was cordial, friendly, evidently pleased. If he could only meet her wherever he went she would make things easy for him! He must meet her. He had

done other things more impossible; she probably went everywhere.

"I'm going out a great deal," he said with superiority.

"And I, very little."

That was bad. "Bored?" he asked.

"Not tonight," she declared with a smile. How she led him on—this girl! She was indeed an education.

"But you must go somewhere," he insisted. "There's this Egyptian entertainment for instance—"

"Yes, I know."

"Please come," he pleaded.

"Well what shall we wear?" she asked. And from that they proceeded to a consideration of each other's best points. Unnecessary to add they were enjoying themselves.

He started to clothe her in the raiment of a queen, as a man who admires a woman will. He wanted her to be Cleopatra herself and, learning the role was already cast, he still suggested an Egyptian swathed in precious stones, in a dress of gold brocade, in sandals studded with pearls. She shook her head firmly and, when pressed for a reason, said her hair was too light. He demurred and finally yielded. She must come in Greek draperies then, simple, severe. She turned her profile.

"Delicious!"

"Only snub!"

She laughed and he flattered. Absorbed and delighted they were surprised suddenly to find everyone had risen. They rose too, and Miss Blair disappeared with a smile; Mrs. Cauldwell, without so much as a look. He didn't have a chance to speak to either of

them again, but he had another few minutes with his friend Marsh. It was after Guitry had presented him to a stout woman in white who beamed upon him, apparently for no other reason than that he was one of those present, and her beams were universal.

"It's a great evening," she observed, radiating her smiles over the room. "Ah, Monsieur de Guitry," she said confidentially, "while we three have a minute alone have you heard the story Mr. Reardon Wells told the other night at Mrs. Neylor's dinner?" Guitry was grieved to say he had not. Olmstead was appealed to, and, also with regrets, he acknowledged that he hadn't even been there. It was then that she caught sight of Mr. Marsh. "You always remember everything," she said addressing him with some excitement. "What was that story Mr. Reardon Wells told the other evening at Mrs. Neylor's? Do you happen to have heard it? No?"

Mr. Marsh blinked his eyes and shook his head silently and gravely. For the first time he seemed to have lost his voice. He only recovered it when she had disappeared, obviously in search of some one who did know the story.

"She collects them," he whispered drily in Olmstead's ear.

"Collects?" he echoed.

"Yes, stories for the comic papers; they pay for her taxis."

"I don't understand."

"You tell one tonight, next week you wake up with a start to see yourself in print."

"But suppose you want to use it yourself?"

"Well, then you don't tell it," chuckled the critic, "Don't misunderstand," he hastened to add, "she's a

very nice woman, I assure you—soul of honor—I assure you!”

“But she likes to ride in taxis!” exclaimed Olmstead.

“Precisely, precisely,” said the humorist. “Ah, it’s a pleasure to talk to such as you. You’re so safe!” Olmstead gave an involuntary start.

“Every one nowadays is out for meat,” the critic went on confidentially, “they call it copy, and we others, we haven’t enough to supply ourselves. The vultures are everywhere! Over there is one who assimilates unconsciously. She belongs to one of our old families; quite well off; just writes for love of it; they’re the worst sort!”

Olmstead caught sight of the lady’s back; a diamond crescent clasped her gown; he kept his eyes on it as he exclaimed:

“You don’t mean——”

“It’s too bad—too bad,” said the humorist gravely, shaking his head. “Writers everywhere; you can’t escape them. There was a time when there were just a few of us in the days when we used to gather at old Pfaff’s, thirty years ago, and exchange ideas and jokes. There was conversation in those days, free and even brilliant. Why, my friend, we used to tell our jokes in public as freely as children chatter in their nurseries. There was meat enough then to go around. The writers were few and the talkers many. Then came the first comic paper; jokes became negotiable property. Presently the universal desire to be in print spread like an epidemic. We grew wise and timid; conversation became dull and scarce.”

“You don’t mean to say that you are really afraid of one another?”

“Of course, that is just what I do mean. We can’t,

you see, copyright our phrases even when we rather fancy them, and there's always the danger that someone else may fancy them too. We have learned to guard our wares and if we think of something good we don't say it. We write it on our cuffs instead, or make a mental note of it for future use. Now of course that limits repartee, to say the least. The brilliant people in literary circles today are those who don't write. But, alas, there are so precious few of them. An architect builds a house, and straightway some publisher invites him to write a book. An artist paints the picture of a celebrity and, incidentally, writes the story of how the sitter sat; a musician studies in Germany, and you have a volume of letters; the lawyer rushes into print with the romantic side of his latest case. The result is that nowadays we think only once before we write and twice before we speak. It used to be the other way around, but that was in the days of literature, when literature was a profession. Ah, you're such a relief!"

"I?" gasped Olmstead.

"Yes, you're so safe," said Mr. Marsh, grasping his hand to say good-night. "So safe," he repeated.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE board room, Hackett stood smiling upon the Inner Circle, rubbing his hands together with glee, nodding exultantly, humanly, as one who would say, "I told you so!"

"Olmstead will be here presently," he announced, "His friend, the Count, detains him," he added with a triumphant chuckle.

By evidence of the brilliant trophy, which his "man of affairs" had handed over to the committee, the young man, in his very first engagement, had been successful.

And now the members of the Inner Circle were crowding around the Judge, straining eyes and necks towards a diamond crescent which he was delicately manipulating with a pair of jeweler's nippers, carefully unsetting, one by one, the precious stones.

Eager-eyed, glowing with expectancy, they waited. Anxiously, with ill-disguised impatience, they searched the Judge's face for some sign of appraisal, while according to their tastes and their necessities, they planned, calculated, divided.

But the Judge was not to be hurried. He was an expert by training, he had a reputation to maintain. When he spoke they could trust him, he had rarely or never been mistaken—he knew the market, their

market especially. He turned the stones over and over, and at last said deprecatingly:

"The small ones are worth a mere trifle. Five hundred for the lot would be a good price. But the big one in the centre is of the first water."

They were all hanging upon his words.

"But small," he went on, "and of the old-fashioned rose cut, which lessens its value."

The silence grew even more intense as they waited for its figure.

The Judge turned and twisted the jewel under his glass.

"It must have belonged to an ancestor; how they treasure their property, these old families!" he exclaimed in disgust.

"However, it's a presentable bit," he declared at last, "worth in the neighborhood of—say fifteen hundred—er—to us."

"Fifteen hundred!"

"Perhaps even more. If we're lucky we may get as high as twenty-two hundred for the lot."

They echoed the amount with satisfaction. It wasn't a fortune, but it represented a successful beginning in a perilous venture. At first they were frankly jubilant and good-humored, confidential and appreciative. They congratulated one another sincerely, earnestly; the ease of their investment pleased them; they were a new lot of men in their good humor. All their best qualities seemed to come to the front. For a time they reveled in the exchange of anecdotes and experiences. They even rendered the "old man" homage by using the language dear to his heart.

Gradually, following the appraisalment of the property, came a question of the division, and then,

in a flash, the recollection that the annual meeting of the stockholders was due with some sort of report.

Report? It was as though a new idea had been exploded. Even Hackett was baffled at the effect of it. It was as though they thought he was trying to rob them. He actually felt called upon to apologize. He tried to make atonement by suggesting a postponement of the meeting; in the circumstances, he assured them, a highly proper proceeding and quite in accordance with precedent. But they still remained frowning and hostile. He was conscious, suddenly, that they regarded him with suspicion in spite of the victorious results still glittering on the table.

Presently they began openly railing against the stockholders, referring to them as a few insignificant business men. To be tied to them was incredible, preposterous. Even the Judge, made bold now by success so easy, won with so little risk to himself, was as contemptuous of them as he had once seemed to be solicitous.

"They wouldn't dare claim anything, I mean publicly," he muttered. "And if those stones are divided we get next to nothing," he growled out at last.

"Di-vi-ded!" The Frenchman, Duflon, echoed the word, giving to each syllable its full value, assisted by a shrug of his shoulders and a contemptuous drawing down of his mouth at the corners.

"In our rotten state, we can't afford it."

"What the hell are stockholders for anyway?"

Hackett turned a startled ear to these familiar warnings of disaster. He recognized the mutterings of greed uncontrolled, unreasoning as the greed of hogs in sight of food. What he heard frightened him, for he knew just where it would lead.

A dozen times he had seen the links that bound the association broken, the members scattered, betrayed by some one on the inside who had played false. A dozen times he had reorganized them, always treasuring the belief that if once he could satisfy those in control with sufficient success, he could establish them on a solid, enduring basis. He believed success was in sight now with this new deal; he was sure of it! This time he must find a way to hold the Inner Circle together with some show of respect; he must appease them, but with honor—to themselves; he actually called it honor. In the legitimate world of finance they must have provided for just such greed as this, there must be some precedent that he could quote and thus maintain the great principle of the organization.

Hackett strode up and down the room, ransacking his brain for some justification that would prevent an open revolt.

Olmstead was due at any moment. If these men were to desert now, the effect upon him would be serious. They were fast passing beyond control, fast going from whispered mutterings to outspoken threats. They would tear him to pieces before they would divide with those whom they knew to be still ignorant of what belonged to them. He was mad to dream it—mad.

Suddenly he paused and faced them with a new light in his eyes.

"I'm with you," he cried triumphantly. "You are right, quite right, we must accommodate ourselves to our times; we can't afford to drop behind!"

He crossed hurriedly to the rickety table where a dozen books were piled. He searched among them *eagerly*.

"How Did He Get It?" "What Are You Going To Do About It?" "Modern Sin." One after the other he flung them aside till he came upon a small shabby volume, bound in green, entitled, "A Little Journey in the World." Holding it up in a trembling hand, he faced a menacing, sullen group.

"The proceeds of this investment are ours," he cried in a voice tremulous with excitement. "Ours alone, not only by right of possession, but also by right of precedent. Gentlemen, will you give me ten minutes, ten minutes of your valuable time? Mr. Secretary—Mr. Treasurer—" The old man pleaded with them earnestly, convincingly.

One by one they returned to their places, while he, with a look as if inspired, sat down at the head of the table, placing the book in front of him.

He nodded at his companions, beaming.

"Gentlemen," he began carefully, "this association has run down. Briefly, I propose that we should sift our members—get those who are not of advantage to us out—and begin again."

"Sift," echoed the Frenchman, Duflon, softly.

"Yes, beginning with our stockholders, those who are not satisfied." Hackett made a dramatic pause.

"Here is the way!" he resumed, smiling significantly, and taking up the shabby book before him he ran it over hastily; it was dogeared from end to end. "The man who wrote this book was a famous American, he knew what he was talking about—listen!" He handed it open at a certain page to his learned friend the Judge, and asked him to read aloud certain marked paragraphs, beginning with the word to which he pointed.

"'The wreckers.'" began the Judge.

"You are to suppose that we are the wreckers!" interposed Hackett.

"The wreckers fasten upon some railway or other property that is prosperous, pays dividends, pays a liberal interest on its bonds and has a surplus——"

"Not exactly our parallel yet," breathed Hackett.

"They contrive to buy, no matter at what cost," the Judge went on reading, "'a controlling interest in it—either in its stock or its management.'"

"We have it—we the Inner Circle," explained Hackett.

"Then they let it run down—it pays no dividends and, by and by, cannot even pay its interest, then——"

"Listen here my friends," cried Hackett, "I beg of you—" The author himself could not have been more eager.

"Then they squeeze the bondholders," went on the reader, "'who may be glad to accept anything that is offered out of the wreck.'"

The eyes of the Inner Circle gleamed appreciatively.

"And perhaps then they throw the property into the hands of a receiver," continued the Judge impressively, "'or consolidate it with some other property at a value enormously greater than the cost to them in stealing it——'"

To a man, his listeners straightened up at the word steal.

"Go on, my friend," urged the chairman, with visible excitement. "We are nearing the end!"

"The Judge resumed— "'Having in one way or another sucked it dry, the wreckers look around for another property and all the people who first invested lose their money.'"

"There you have it!" cried Hackett, with all the

triumph of a discoverer. "An invention of the great financiers whose example we strive so hard to follow!"

"Damned clever," declared Cryder appreciatively.

"Our stockholders are already squeezed," the Judge observed profoundly, closing the book.

"Precisely," cried Hackett with enthusiasm. "To business men—as simple as A, B, C! The company is sucked dry; not only does it not pay dividends, it cannot even pay interest; it is wrecked!"

He paused and then declared importantly, "We are a Trust, like any Trust, banded together for our own betterment."

The old man had succeeded; he had brought the directors back into the fold. They helped themselves in high good humor from the familiar box he now shoved towards them.

"——I'm not smoking—but—well——" the Judge, completely recovered, grabbed up two of the cigars, which he put in his pocket, and then fell to stroking thoughtfully his gray whiskers. Visibly excited, Cryder ejected his wad in order to light up. Monsieur Duflon blew out little rings from between lips that smiled.

"Now let us be generous," observed Hackett in his most complacent manner. "Let us divide what assets we have in our safe at this moment—" he glanced at their last investment, still lying where all could see it—"and permit our stockholders to drop out without further risk to them. Then, as I understand the law of precedent, that will allow us of the Inner Circle to reconsolidate with increased capital on a new basis—er—with new property."

The closing of the outer door startled them. In an instant Hackett was on his feet, shuffling to the gate

near the typewriter which was open, as always, with sheets of paper lying about as though it had just been deserted.

Olmstead entered in the best of health and spirits—the man victorious. He arrived just at the right moment. Hackett sank back exhausted, while the others greeted him with compliments, with praise for his prowess. They plied him with questions, eager for details that would assure them he had escaped without suspicion. They listened leniently when he explained to them that the literary world was a business world, made up a thrifty lot of men and women, with no desire to shine except for money. He described his dinner companions, one of them with enthusiasm. He told how his chance had come, at last, to annex the diamond pin from the back of the lady who belonged to one of the old families.

"I knew it!" exclaimed the Judge.

"She is nevertheless the unconscious assimilator of other peoples' property," quoted Olmstead, looking as pleased as Punch. "A literary kleptomaniac!" he explained.

"You see they use a language of courtesy there too," croaked Hackett. "It helps to keep up one's self-respect."

The Judge nodded back an amiable assent which he emphasized presently to the glowing satisfaction of the old man. He asked if the investment had been an easy one.

"Easy!" Olmstead smiled with the air of a conqueror as he gave them details to prove it.

Presently he rose, delved into his overcoat pocket and threw down on the table a roll of papers. With greedy hands the Honorable Board of Directors spread

them out. They seemed to be a neatly made series of drawings, not in the least like an architect's plans, and yet, by the eagerness with which these men devoured them, evidently revealing just what they were looking for. There were small black dots and thick black dots that seemed of tremendous import. They talked of entrances and escapes, of ropes and ladders, hooks and bands, keys and electric switches with an enthusiasm that would have been as incomprehensible to the uninitiated as the sketches before them.

"In your opinion, then, this speculation is a good one?" asked Hackett importantly.

"Unquestionably," declared the young man.

"Without risk?"

"As long as I can live up to my part I'm safe——"

He broke off suddenly. Good Lord, how could they appreciate what that meant! He had for the first time in his life a vague regret that his companions were so ordinary; it was a pity he couldn't have the applause of a less shabby lot.

About him the great names of the great world were being bandied from mouth to mouth familiarly, exultantly, contemptuously. They wanted to know if Olmstead would see some of them.

"The Count can go anywhere," he answered, "and I shall go with him."

At this point Hackett rapped for order and, assuming his office of chairman, said at last: "Gentlemen, will some one please move that we redeem our bonds? Is it a motion?"

"The ayes have it," he announced presently. "And now Judge, your most conservative estimate again."

"We may count on two thousand, safely," answered the Judge.

"Divided among seven!" cried an enthusiast.

Olmstead looked from one to the other puzzled, but in spite of the fact that he had been selected for so important an assignment, it was quite evident that he was not to be given the details of what was apparently a strange and involved transaction, affecting the association at large. Later, when Hackett explained the moves to him he had, after his own fashion, supplemented his quotations from the little green book with a dozen others from as many different sources.

"Cornering a Railroad with Borrowed Money."
"The Using of Moneys Collected for One Object and Expended for Another." The Empowering of a Chairman to Borrow Such Money as He Should See Fit." "Investment in Worthless Property Without a Pretense of Accounting." Those were just a few of them.

"This afternoon we will pay off our stockholders," said the chairman sanctimoniously. "We will return to them such assets as we had on hand before we became a close corporation."

The treasurer crossed to the safe.

"Our assets are small," he remarked serenely.

"Let us return them!" exclaimed Duflon, with the air of a man willing to sacrifice his all.

And with that the meeting rested.

CHAPTER VII

WHILE the wreckers were busy negotiating the closing out of the stockholders, something, that might have shaken their confidence and halted proceedings, had they known it, had happened to Olmstead. In the circumstances it was certainly a serious setback.

Encouraged by the success of his companion at Mrs. Cartwright's dinner and with every confidence in his discretion, Guitry had taken him to call on Mrs. Larabee, a famous leader of society. From there, after what seemed to Olmstead a period of painful constraint, during which he had sat on the extreme edge of a red velvet chair, he had carried away with him the conviction that the one most important thing in life is to be able to talk fluently about nothing. And in that he had failed ignominiously. He had, it seemed, actually stumbled upon something.

Once outside Guitry had turned to Olmstead in real consternation, exclaiming that it was most dangerous to rouse the enmity of one so powerful as Mrs. Larabee, indeed to a degree awkward. Of course it was well to have courage, but after all, if he wanted to be invited to people's houses it was important to propitiate them.

Olmstead was conscious that something had gone wrong and, as he waited to learn just what, he slowly

reviewed the scene from the moment that he had stumbled over a tiger's head in trying to make an effective entrance into a dim drawing room, overcrowded with inanimate objects, till this moment when Guitry was asking him if he had not remarked the awful silence that he had precipitated, the scandalized expressions of the two other callers.

Unmistakably something had gone wrong, and unmistakably it had dated from the appearance of a small boy of ten, the living image of Mr. Larabee. He had come into the room and Olmstead, glad of a chance to hear the sound of his own voice, had remarked the likeness.

Hear André de Guitry!

"That affair is a scandal! *Voyons*, they have only been married four years and this son, who is at least ten, was born while his mother was still Mrs. Oberlie, living with her first husband. The boy's name is Oberlie, and the history of Mrs. Larabee is as familiar as the history of our Sarah Bernhardt, or your Theodore Roosevelt," cried Guitry at a loss for a simile.

For a moment Olmstead was overwhelmed by his companion's reproaches and by the sense of his own awkwardness. Then he recovered to say defiantly, "But the boy is the living image of his step-father!" Quite as though the truth of his remark was the only part of it in question.

"I acknowledge it, yes, so he is. But a guest, calling at the house, does not comment upon it aloud!"

On that they had parted.

At his hotel, Olmstead's Man of Affairs awaited him. He was in no mood for him or anyone else, but nevertheless he was obliged to suffer his presence. In a

genteel suit of black, carrying a shabby wallet, he was quite in his part. Olmstead remembered him for years appearing at odd moments, always, in his eternal search for precedent, with pockets or wallet bulging with clippings, or with a couple of well-worn books or a package of papers under his arm. Now his first question irritated.

"Anything new?" he asked.

Olmstead shrugged, and Hackett responded with a series of grunts ranging from uneasy dissatisfaction to impatient scorn.

"Here's something that'll be a help," he said presently.

Opening his wallet with uncertain fingers, he took out a number of envelopes of all sizes and shapes—long, wide, deep, thick, fat, all holding clippings from every sort of printed page.

"To get on the trail of any animal you must first know his hiding places," he grunted. "You've seen Arliss as Disraeli, eh?" The young man nodded. "Well he's full of good stuff, I mean Disraeli: 'Legalized Confiscation!' I got that from him; he knew the law."

Olmstead was thinking he had never seen the old man look so gray and worn. He was evidently hard hit by this last disaffection of the Justifiables. No wonder, after all these years!

"Oil, copper, sugar, beef, steel; kings and criminals of society; heroes of the newspapers." Hackett rolled off the important names of the great world familiarly as he threw their envelopes upon the table.

"Presently Olmstead of the Jewel Trust will join them," he announced, gazing hard at the young man where he sat gloomy and silent.

"These are the most important," he observed, sorting them over in a final readjustment. "Parsons, the banker; we've had dealings with him. Our friend Dunstan; the Count de Guitry himself. Here's good stuff about them all."

After a pause, during which Olmstead ran his eyes over a bunch of clippings, Hackett said: "Some day these envelopes will go into our obituary department. When we reorganize——"

He was really wonderful, standing there worn and gray, rising undaunted from this last blow just as he had risen from a dozen others, grimly determined to try again. Even Olmstead was amazed.

"You really expect to reorganize; I mean with stockholders and all," he blurted out.

Hackett turned upon him. "It all depends upon you," he cried hoarsely. "The next time we must organize on a firmer basis, the basis of more money. When, with your continued success, we are able to sell our shares at an advance, our directors will understand the advantages of carrying our stockholders over; they'll be willing even to declare a dividend; it all depends upon you."

With that Hackett came back to what was uppermost in his mind.

"It's two days since your first investment," he said uneasily. "They're getting impatient."

Olmstead received this in silence.

"They're envious," growled Hackett. "They say you've got a cinch."

"I recognize the vernacular," sneered Olmstead.

"Time for some more results, my boy," insisted the other, ignoring the sneer. "You must remember your chance comes through them."

Olmstead, apparently absorbed in the revelations that he was gathering from the paragraphs before him, remained equally indifferent to both suggestions. Hackett, after a few uneasy glances, drew up to the table, and the two settled down to what was evidently the business of the hour. They kept at it for a time, making notes about important people and their manner of life, reading out paragraphs that revealed peculiarities and characteristics which Hackett supplemented with a running fire of reminiscences.

He was familiar with all sorts of anecdotes of millionaires living and millionaires dead. He told of a great merchant who had once been in such dire straits that he had served as his own auctioneer in the selling of a rug—a rug of some value, except for a hole which he hid with his foot while calling for bids. He recalled how a noted collector, famous for his tricks, had advanced the price of snuff boxes by putting one of his own up at auction, and then bidding it in at an enormous figure. He knew who the friends of a certain Comptroller were, and the friends who had been aided by them with tips on realty. He talked with ease of class legislature, of corrupt judges, of yellow dog funds, of inflated capitalization, of millionaire autocrats. If one of those he held as enemies had ever done anything noble it was not for him to acknowledge it. He knew enough of party politics for that.

"Thank God for the newspapers," he said with fervor. "You can get a line on almost anyone; no one is sacred, and nothing."

"Is there anything against this Guity?" asked Olmstead suddenly.

"It was the father."

"Well, the father?"

Hackett gave an unpleasant smile. "There's a woman living in the little town of Besançon, deserted, penniless. She had been faithful since her girlhood. Baxter found out about her three days before the Guitry transaction. It was a habit of his to find out the sins of his victims. He used to say they gave him courage—the might of right. Well, he found out that the old man had left the woman desolate. The news acted upon him like the glass of liquor that other men take."

Olmstead grunted and returned to his clippings. Hackett, after watching him in silence for some minutes, picked up a thick, bulging envelope marked—"Dunstan" and threw it across the table to him: "Arpad—Mildred—Kate— In there you'll find pictures of them all. Remember always they're the people you are going to deal with," he said. "Study them, every detail of them. You can't know enough. First the woman, Mildred; and then the man, Arpad."

Hackett had risen now but he came back to the table and said with emphasis, "I've got something that if properly manipulated, by a man of education——"
"Well?"

"Use the check first; get Mildred on her knees;" he said. "Then—then—come to me."

It was impossible to tell if he really had anything else up his sleeve. Olmstead, himself, wasn't sure that this wasn't a ruse in order to keep his hold, as it were.

Hackett went on: "This man Dunstan is shrewd; I saw him once; he's afraid of no one, and nothing; all powerful. However, in every man's life there's something, the thing is to find out what—and act *upon it*."

Hackett lapsed into silence.

"Dunstan!" Olmstead ran his eyes over a clipping: "Arpad Dunstan—sixty-two years old—multi-millionaire—known as the Napoleon of Finance—Director of the National Bank of the Metropolis—of the Eastern Insurance Company—President of the New Grade Western Railroad—shrewd business man and patron of the Arts—great collector. Arpad Dunstan's collection of precious stones is unequaled in America—he carries some of them around with him, loose in his vest pocket."

The learned reporter went on to assure the reader that, among lovers and collectors of precious stones, this habit was not unusual. He recalled that the late Henry Ward Beecher was known to have the same idiosyncrasy. Olmstead skimmed over the wordy description of the wondrous feeling of the stones to the real connoisseur, the fire and glow of them, the glory of the touch to the sensitive hand, etc., etc. He skimmed till he came to a really important paragraph. From it he learned that the greater part of Dunstan's jewels were carefully guarded in a safe in his own study, equipped with shelves of steel, which might be rolled out when he wanted to display them to the amazed eyes of a chosen few.

"That's the kind of personal stuff, eh?" cried Hackett. "You wouldn't think it would interest what they call the general public, but it's just right for us!"

At last Olmstead picked up a thin, shapely envelope marked—"Belknap."

"'Mrs. Wallace Belknap,'" he read from a paragraph inside. "'In a hospital—threatened with serious operation.' What of it?"

"Well, she didn't have the operation; she's very

much in the world again. Some time ago she lost a valuable trinket; some weeks later she lost another; we haven't handled any of her stock since. Note her down; she's either safe or she isn't; that's for you to find out. She never registered her losses as far as we know, but she may be working with private detectives. You'll meet her," Hackett went on. "She's in the Count's set; her husband is the big steel man."

The name seemed to stir him to new enthusiasm for the extraordinary opportunities that, through him, were to be within reach of the young man. He dwelt on them at length, trying to rouse him once more to a proper sense of gratitude.

"You'll soon take my place in the Inner Circle," he said at last, as though voicing the culmination of a man's desires.

Olmstead raised his eyes to the shrunken, undistinguished person opposite him.

"You'll have them in the hollow of your hand," Hackett went on, mistaking the look. "Meanwhile, don't forget, they envy you the job."

Olmstead passed them in quick mental review—the men he was to lead. He pictured any one of them, in a drawing room holding his own against one of those thin-blooded aristocrats, covered with jewels, calm as an oyster!

"They're a shabby, ungrateful lot," he said.

"No one is ever grateful. Some men are sensible."

Hackett glanced at him several times, uneasily, before he spoke again.

"After all," he said at last, "they're the men that are going to help you do the trick. If they were different, perhaps you might not be able to impress *them*."

With that he nodded grimly; then, shuffling to his feet, walked slowly up the room, unconscious that his remark was to sink deep into the soul of him who had had proof of its truth. Sitting there now, with the full consciousness of his recent failure in a set that was different, Olmstead was, for a moment, almost startled by the old man's perspicuity into asking advice, even into confession.

Hackett walked up the room and turned. He saw that his remark had registered.

"In a country of blind men he who has one eye is king," he quoted, eager to air an erudition that had never introduced him to the wonderful little tale by H. G. Wells which reverses the proverb. "The truth of that," he went on, "reconciled me long ago to the sort of men we could annex. In the beginning I thought we could find others, but it isn't easy; education makes cowards. If you can slip through and make good, that's all we expect."

Olmstead listened without protest to the contemptuous tone of all this. If—if—in some unaccountable manner the image of Miss Blair came suddenly to his rescue. He smiled as he thought of her.

"Have you any clipping about Ethel Blair?" he asked.

Hackett had never even heard of her.

"She's one of them," said Olmstead with a touch of pride as Hackett repeated the name. "Yes, and I'm to see her again!"

He sat thinking of Mrs. Cartwright's dinner and of his success there; he forgot his moments of perturbation; he had succeeded; he would succeed again. But, meanwhile, he must have the confidence of his backers.

"Have you got Larabee there?" he asked "E. D. S.?"

"His wife owns a rope of pearls worth a hundred thousand dollars!" This the impression the name of Larabee conjured up to the mind of Olmstead's companion. Hackett reached for the envelope marked "L." He read out—"Larabee, formerly Mrs. Oberlie—divorced—both husbands alive—both millionaires—retains custody of young son by first marriage."

"Then there is some good in her," observed Olmstead.

"Plenty of bad," rejoined the other.

"At least she didn't desert the youngster."

Olmstead half closed his eyes and forced a smile, as though the full consciousness of his miserable mistake were not staring him in the face.

"I called there this afternoon," he went on easily, "just a social call; really a most comfortable sensation entering through the front door, an honored guest; Olmstead the Australian millionaire!"

"You called there?" breathed Hackett, his faded eyes beginning to glow.

"Yes, just an informal visit—a few intimate friends."

"In the swim at last!" croaked Hackett. "I'd have sworn you were good for it. The Larabees! Their silver is famous!"

"You may care for this," Olmstead interrupted, tossing on the table a large white envelope. "It's the latest thing in invitations," he remarked as the other reached for it. "Documentary evidence of my success!"

"Mrs. John Van S. Cruger requests the pleasure of Mr. John Burr Olmstead's company—Tomorrow!" Hackett broke off. His voice grew shrill with excite-

ment. He leaned across the table and said in a low tense voice! "When you've got on to the inside workings you can count on Cryder or Boland! 'Mrs. Van S. Cruger requests'—this'll satisfy the Inner Circle for the present. You can come with me and tell them yourself," cried Hackett turning at the door, generously offering to give him his moment.

But Olmstead let him go alone. He remained with his clippings. He studied the little woodcuts of Kate, the daughter of Arpad Dunstan, and Mildred, the wife.

"Chairman of the Metropolitan Hospital Board," he read. He took out the pink cheque, and at sight of it he smiled, thinking how he'd make her beg for mercy, thinking what a run he'd give her for her money.

Along in his room many hours from the scene of his mistakes he reasoned calmly, judicially, courageously. What man hasn't? Blame himself? Nonsense! He was glad he had said what he did; glad—glad! He repeated this so many times that he really believed it. The Larabees deserved what they got. He wouldn't help hide their skeleton. Why should he? He who had gone into their world to fight! They were of the idle luxurious crowd whom he despised and who despised him. And yet, of course, he must succeed with just those smug, self-satisfied, lazy pop-injays, those who were different.

It all seemed so easy now. Why had he ever been tongue-tied? He had things to say; why hadn't he said them? He recalled the phrase—"Cab wit." Why hadn't he talked of Mrs. Cartwright's dinner—and Miss Blair, his friend Ethel Blair? And once again the image of Ethel Blair came out from the back of his brain, where he carried her as a sort of prop to

his pride. It doesn't seem a nice way to designate a girl, and he didn't. He thought of her as bully, genuine, real—and in that set!

With some contempt Olmstead saw André de Guitry reappear in his rooms, an aristocrat in his service, not daring to throw him over till he had received his pay. They both were frigidly polite, the incident at the Larabee's was avoided as too unpleasant to speak of. Guitry's first words however were reassuring. He had been planning great things, new encounters; they must forget what had happened and try to conquer new salons. He was more than kindly, he was generous.

"*Tiens*," he said; "it was my fault. The blame is mine. I should have made for you a guide. I should have warned you with the current gossip and told you some facts. How should you, who know your Australian mines, know also American society? One has no right to expect it." Guitry was really apologetic, in spite of Olmstead's manner which was anything but gracious.

"Don't distress yourself," he said, "our contract does not demand it."

"But I want your success," Guitry protested.

"It was only demanded of you to introduce me; you're overdoing your part of the bargain."

"But I want to introduce you with success. I want you to know your compatriots, your equals. All my ambition is for you. I only ask that you repeat the success of the other evening."

Guitry went on to tell Olmstead how pleased he had been when that very day some one had spoken to him of his delightful friend.

"One cannot hope to meet a Miss Blair everywhere!" Olmstead said at last.

"Miss Blair?" Guitry did not remember her; he had really not noticed her! Her brown hair streaked with red, her skin of ivory, blue veined; her eyes, green gray, the lovely line of her neck—was it possible? Olmstead looked at him incredulous.

"Your man of affairs"—Guitry asked abruptly. "Is he not here?"

"No, he's ill," Olmstead answered, wondering a little at the question.

"Ah, too bad; not serious I hope?"

Guitry's concern surprised Olmstead because he had scarcely seemed to notice his silent man of affairs.

"His heart is affected" he explained.

"Ah, too bad! I——"

Gradually Olmstead became conscious that there was something quite foreign to all this on the Count's mind. He was now walking up and down, restless, and ill at ease.

"*Voyons, mon ami,*" he began at last. "It is not to my taste to ask you but I must."

He paused and Olmstead braced himself.

"I have the urgent need for some more money," he confessed.

What a relief, and what an old story! All this amiability and generosity—all merely a need of future favors. Olmstead smiled cynically as he said in a hard metallic tone:

"I have made you one advance, and you must remember your expenses are paid."

"Yes, mine, and well paid," Guitry answered with emphasis though not without embarrassment; "but there is some one else who—a woman——"

Olmstead did not try to conceal his amazement while André de Guitry raised his hand.

"This lady was a friend of my father," he said with much dignity. "My father was a good man, as men go, but in this case—it is enough for me to say to you she has her rights. Also she is poor, old, living alone in the little town of Besançon. But her letter, received this morning, explains the situation; she is desolate; it is that I have spent too much upon myself."

Guitry held out a sheet of fine slanting writing which Olmstead waved aside.

"How much does she need?" he asked.

"Over there she does well for a time with a couple of hundred francs," answered the Count. "On our way we despatch them? It is charity." Guitry was unwilling Olmstead should take anything on faith. "Ah *mon ami*, you shall send this money. It will bring you luck today in the salons of Madam Van Schuyler Cruger."

Olmstead cringed at the word—"*ami*." As always it grated upon his nerves.

"We will today watch and be silent." Guitry resumed. "In time your mistakes of yesterday are sure to be forgiven and forgotten. You will live them down. Now let us see; today our hostess is the mother of a Duchess unhappily married, therefore, we dwell not upon international matches. She has a nose that is red to mortification, so we speak not of complexions. She wears many jewels in the morning, therefore we avoid the subject of taste."

The Count had Olmstead's undivided attention.

"*Maintenant de l'audace*," he murmured in his ear some time later. "Only I pray you be discreet." And

they entered under the awning, up the steps, through a line of lackeys.

A blast of hot air heavy with the scent of flowers; a mingling of dark woods and dull tapestries, gilded frames and gorgeous mirrors; a vision of red carpeted steps thronged with human beings, a flash of radiance and a riot of sound! Then an awful moment when Olmstead heard his name shouted out into the room. His heart seemed to turn turtle, and above the din of music, as in a dream, a scattering of words from isolated sentences reached him.

"Ham and eggs after the cotillion——" "This is my fifth tea in an hour——" "Been posing since noon!" "Lost a cool hundred——" "Howdy, same to you——" "Scandalous—who was she?"

Then the music, to which no one seemed to listen, marked the time for him where he stood, conscious and isolated, in the midst of a chattering crowd. Guitry had done his best for him, but the event was responsible also for launching himself once more among certain friends he hadn't seen for months, and for the moment he had his hands full. He left Olmstead beside their hostess, and then forgot him. So did she. And if they should remember him! In these new and luxurious surroundings he felt that he was certain to know again the agony of being tonguetied. He saw his awkwardness now in its most serious aspect. For the first time in his life he had lost confidence in himself. He had suffered a sudden sharp change of class without proper equipment. He grew hot under his collar; he wanted to shrink out of sight; he felt that his very height was a detriment.

Of what avail now was all his boasted control of muscles or nerves? The waiters, the footman were

every one in possession of just such control. They were at their ease because they had had the good sense to remain in their proper sphere. He was out of his; that was what was wrong. It was as though a man who had never learned to swim should suddenly be thrown into deep water. It was worse, for he, at least, could drown.

It seemed to him hours that he stood there alone. Other people seemed to be alone—were they suffering too? As he wondered he saw one after the other of them fade away, greet an acquaintance, join some group. A hundred people flashed their eyes on him. What on earth is that man doing there? Into every look he read that question. He tried to brace himself with the thought that soon it would be his turn to make them suffer. Meanwhile they were discovering that no one spoke to him, that he didn't belong, that he was a rank outsider.

Suddenly with a crash of the orchestra—never will he forget that it was a motif from Lohengrin—he became conscious that a button was missing on his right shoe. How absurd! As though anyone would notice! He held the glove of his left hand in his right hand. That seemed to him awkward and he tried to put it on. The thumb split. The broad shouldered man in a dress suit who shouted out people's names glanced at him; the blood rushed to his face; every part of him was conscious of existence.

"I beg pardon." Any time afterwards in his life he'd have sworn it was the sweetest voice he had ever heard! "Might I just——? There——" She sank into a seat with the ease of one of them; unmistakably she belonged. "I hate a crowd, don't you?" she asked. And while he was trying to find

his voice she went on. "You do, or you'd never have found this corner. It's fun looking at them though—don't you think?"

"Yes, that's what I was doing," he managed to say.

If ever a woman was blessed by man it was this one at that moment! She wasn't beautiful and she looked pale with dark lines under her eyes, but she had style, the style of the moment which creates figures even as it does clothes, and she had a smile that was heaven; at least she had lifted him with it from hell. Her nose turned up, her mouth turned up, the corners of her eyes and her eyebrows turned up, and she had on a tiny black hat with a brim turned way up on one side.

"Do you know many people here?"

"Not too many," he murmured. And again terrible self-consciousness possessed him. There was an empty chair near her, but he didn't know whether to take it or not. If he leaned over it was awkward. If he stood up he was too tall.

"Do sit down," she said, all graciousness and smiles. "If you're like my brother," she went on easily, "you know all the people you want to know." Then catching his glance, or if she didn't she pretended to, she said, "Yes, I've a brother as old as you are I guess, fifteen years younger than I am. I brought him up."

"Not possible!"

"People always say that whether they mean it or not, just as we women claim the right to a certain line of statements not necessarily true—married at sixteen, unless one has a child, then the child was born when you were sixteen; turned gray at twenty; have worn glasses ever since you were sixteen; eyes always

bad. Well, these things are demanded of us. We give what the public asks, like managers or publishers."

She giggled and Olmstead appreciated that she had the qualities of her features.

"And sometimes we don't give what they ask," she rattled on. "Look in 'Who's Who' and count the women who have dared set down the number of their years; and they're the strong-minded ones! But the point is that if there is one with the courage, no one believes her. So what's the use? If I told you I was forty——"

"I wouldn't believe you!" cried Olmstead promptly.

"Good boy!" she said with approval. "Anyway, I'm young enough to be a friend of my brother."

"I've never had that," he volunteered.

"A friend?"

"A woman who was——"

Olmstead stopped short. In all his life he had never confessed so much to a woman. And this one a stranger, and of the enemy's camp!

"You've missed a great deal," she said, "and so has she." She must have felt his uneasiness for she became abruptly commonplace to give him a chance to recover. "Aren't you going to offer me tea?" she asked.

"Tea? Certainly—tea!" Guitry had never mentioned tea. How the devil? Should he go up to one of those men in swallow-tails and demand tea? If he could only see Guitry!

"Mrs. Porter Gibbs is pouring chocolate," she said, twisting her head to look. "I can't see who's at the tea table, but it's over there."

Olmstead glanced out, with a hopeless expression, over the sea of heads, then he looked into his com-

panion's eyes, and, with the perspiration breaking cold all over him, threw himself upon her mercy.

"I've—I've no manners," he said. "I'm not a society person; I never handed a cup of tea in my life; I couldn't land it, I'm sure I couldn't; I'd upset it—I would—I swear!"

She laughed heartily, but with him.

"Really, you're most refreshing," she declared. "Your frankness is fascinating."

Olmstead felt his backbone stiffen. Here was a new type of woman, a woman much older than Miss Blair, much more sophisticated, and she too liked him.

"Did you mean for me to go after that tea and conduct it personally?"

She laughed again.

"How is it done?" he whispered.

"At the risk of one's life," she answered in a mocking tone.

"I have courage," he exclaimed, "and if you say go——"

"Would you for me?"

He craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the tea table.

"Mrs. Larabee!" he cried. "Make it chocolate!"

She followed his eyes. "Yes, she's pouring; come on and meet her!"

"I did meet her yesterday; she'd drown me in it," he protested.

"Yesterday!" The lady at his side gave a delighted little gurgle. "Are you—is it possible you're Mr. Olmstead, Guitry's friend—are you?"

"Yes," he answered in an agony at what might follow on her discovery.

"Oh I've been so curious to meet you! What fun!

Of course it was horrid of us, but we who know her well couldn't help enjoying it. How did you ever dare? Reggie Smith told it. Your calm assurance; the way you sat down opposite her; absolutely indifferent, looking at M. de Guित्रy with a sort of a half contemptuous smile on your lips, saying little till suddenly her boy appeared; then you had something to say and you said it! And then after—you should hear Reggie tell it." She burst out laughing.

"Go on; let me hear you!"

The request didn't surprise her; she knew men and their vulnerable spots.

"Reggie says you've been leading the life of a hermit in Australia, that you despise society and its conventions. Oh he told us at lot about you! You're fascinating, positively fascinating!"

Olmstead's eyes smiled upon her.

"Don't let us spoil you, don't let Guित्रy make you conventional, don't. You'll have an enormous success if you remain yourself, enormous!"

What a bully woman, Olmstead was thinking.

"Do you know Guित्रy well?" she asked.

"Why surely."

"And do you know Miss Dunstan?"

"Who is she?"

"Oh, you are delicious! She's my dearest friend, and the best known heiress in New York."

Olmstead gave himself rein. "Ah! now I remember," he said, "she owns pearls and a pose!"

At that moment André de Guित्रy came towards them beaming upon his protégé. He presented him right and left to people who all suddenly seemed anxious to shake him by the hand. In the greetings that followed he learned the name of his companion,

and heard her vouch again for the fact that he was delicious.

"We shall be at the opera tonight," said Guitry overjoyed.

"You will be sure to bring Mr. Olmstead into my box!" she cried, holding out her hand to a newcomer. "I'm going now; remember my advice," she whispered to Olmstead. "Till this evening," she called back.

"My friend," Guitry was presently breathing in his ear, "you have arrived! Is she not charming, this Mrs. Belknap? Wallace is her husband; the man of steel. She has made you! A dozen people asked your name as she stood with you! And then when they heard who you were, they told each other the story of your visit to Mrs. Larabee. You have made them laugh; and she, poor lady, has decided to pretend she thought you delightful! It is that remittance to Besançon—it has turned your luck. Tonight we attend the opera; you will see there the school of manners!"

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks," Olmstead remarked, but without a trace of regret.

At his hotel an attentive clerk handed him a dirty scrap of paper that made him raise his eyebrows. As he glanced at it the man exclaimed apologetically: "A small boy in rags said we must be sure to give it to you the moment you came in."

Olmstead crunched it in his hand, and, with a smile half scornful, half amused, went on up to his rooms, where he flung it aside with his hat and his coat.

The afternoon had left him in wonderful spirits. Endless vistas stretched out before him that might lead anywhere. It seemed to him there were no limits

to the heights, social heights, he might climb. He reviewed in wonder the list of fair women and powerful men he had met that day, he heard the word "wit" in his ears. He laughed all by himself at the echo of it.

"Mr. Olmstead of Australia!" How wonderful it all was, and easy—so easy! He had the enjoyment, the sense of pride, that comes to one on discovering a new talent. After all he was the equal of intelligent ladies and gentlemen. He could impress those who were different! He reveled in this for a few minutes and then said aloud, "What next?"

What next? The thought made him serious for he had actually made up his mind not to be content to rest on his laurels. What next? A couple of weeks and then—no, he refused to dwell upon that tonight. It was time for other considerations much more vital to the moment. What next? There would be more receptions, formal and informal. There would be dinners and dances; he must keep his end up. What more extraordinary change in his ambitions could be imagined. All in a day this man who had planned merely to slip into society, unknown and unnoticed, was now imbued with desire to shine, to be of importance. This was due to a strange feeling of advancement, as though he had gone from some cheap melodrama to something real, legitimate, and, like any intelligent actor, success now fed his ambition. He wanted to go on and on.

Step by step he went over what had happened. He had a reputation to live up to which he had acquired on the heels of an indiscretion. He had made them laugh at an impertinence which they had thought intentional. On that he had been pointed out and applauded. On that he must plan his future behavior.

He had shocked them into noticing him. Let him not forget that. The consciousness spurred him on to plan new endeavors on the same line. His faults were proving, as the old French maxim holds they may, to be his qualities. Let him make the most of them with boldness, with discrimination, with skill. One could find the manners prescribed by convention in every gilded drawing room. His mistake had been to try to imitate them, to try and perhaps fail. Mrs. Belknap had said "Don't let us spoil you!" Miss Blair had said—Miss Blair! Think of it, to know two such women!

He mused as he dressed. Just before he left his room he stooped and rescued the small, dirty scrap of paper. He smoothed it out, re-read it, folded it and put it in his vest pocket, having decided to carry it with him to the opera house.

But before he went to the opera he went down into the dining room of one of New York's most fashionable restaurants alone, a fact not worth recording except for a single incident. For a minute he stood in the big doorway, apparently unnoticed except by the diners. He saw an empty table, walked over to it and sat down. He looked across to the centre of the room where he had sat with Guitry a few nights before, wrapped in an agony of self-consciousness. He recalled it all, to the innermost depths; not difficult since at that moment the feeling threatened again to submerge him, as he sat absolutely ignored, neglected, as though by design. He intended to succeed, and there he sat frightened to death by men in service. Presently he pulled himself together, and signaled the Most Important Person in the room. From him he acquired a bill of fare.

"A little caviare to begin?"

Olmstead yielded, conscious of his cowardice. He ordered a single course to follow and laid the bill of fare down for future consideration when he should be braced with time and food. Meanwhile the Most Important Person in the room had gathered it up, as though it were a treasure, and carried it off. There was another lying opposite, equally precious evidently, for he returned and carried that off too.

Olmstead felt that he must have a menu at all costs! He tried to catch the eye of a waiter standing near him. The glance of the man was as elusive as a sunbeam. Finally he turned his back and walked off. Another approached. Olmstead leaned towards him, cleared his throat, and breathed a request. It fell evidently upon the empty air. His own waiter was nowhere to be seen; the others were too busy to take an instant's consideration from their tables that held forth prospects of tips. They treated the forlorn solitary patron with contempt.

Olmstead, all the while, was pumping up courage, courage to prove to himself that he was not afraid of these menials, courage to prove it to them. Presently above the buzz of talk, the clatter of dishes, the din of music, sounded the call of an inspiration that would be a test. He pushed his chair back a little, hugged the table with his knees, sat erect and looked steadily with the eyes of a hypnotist at a shiny black back way in the distance. He gazed until his gaze penetrated. He gazed until the shiny back turned and became a gleaming shirt front, stiff and immaculate, descending upon him haughtily.

"The menu!" commanded Olmstead. "Is it very valuable?" he asked summoning all his self-possession.

The Most Important Person in the room was so amazed that he was awed into silence.

"It must be since it is so very difficult to secure one!"

Olmstead had it at last in his hand! He tore it in half with a quick gesture. "Now it is less valuable," he said, "so perhaps you will leave it here."

What he had done seems a little thing, but the Most Important Person in the room quailed. He had recognized a master.

Olmstead ate the rest of his dinner with a new spic and span menu at his elbow, and when he took his departure he carried with him his self-respect while the Most Important Person in the room stood in the doorway and bowed to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

A VISION of loveliness was Kate Dunstan on this that she reckoned one of the most miserable days of her life, as she rode up to the big brick house that was her home. All New Yorkers know it as well as they know the Morgan Library that is just beyond, as well as they know that the famous hill owes its name to Friend Robert of the old Murray family, as well as they know that Arpad Dunstan has forgiven his daughter for marrying so suddenly, and without his consent, a year ago.

But this was a morning when she was still single. She couldn't sleep, which no one seeing her would have suspected. They would have seen what two shabby girls, in shabby jackets swinging shabby bags, saw as they passed on their way to work: a liveried groom spring to the horse's head, a butler in blue cloth and gilt buttons open the front door, revealing a glimpse of expensive, also expansive, background into which the lovely vision disappeared. One of the shabby girls voiced the envious and popular mind. "Some has everything," was what she said.

Kate Dunstan ascended to her rooms on the third floor in a tiny elevator, paneled and gilded. A maid waited on her in French. Her bath was prepared with French crystals, she was rubbed with French ointments and powders. She slipped into French

underwear, although with an aching heart—aching none the less because she was in a ravishing French creation, elaborately embroidered in roses of gold on a dull green chiffon background. She had only one cause for misery, one object. She hadn't the rent to think of, nor tired feet, nor threadbare clothes; she hadn't the fear of losing her job, or any other nameless terror to divide it with. She was utterly and absolutely absorbed in it.

Most unhappy she sank into one of those French chairs that conceals somewhere in its mechanism a self-regulating air-cushion. In spite of the physical luxury of it she felt as if her sentence were for life.

The Count de Guitry had returned, apparently satisfied, apparently successful, and she was not the first woman he had sought, nor the second, nor—— Some months before he had left, silently and suddenly, without so much as a goodbye to her. She went back now for some slight comfort, also because her thoughts refused control, to the first time she had met him. She was then the conventional rich American girl. Possibly she would have remained so forever if he had not come into her life. The first time she met him she had known that he admired her. His manner of showing this was delightful.

It was at the opera, on a Caruso night. Between the acts all the men and women who helped to decorate the brilliant red horseshoe, were craning their necks and leveling their glasses to see the other men and women who were helping too—all except one man, Kate Dunstan would have sworn. The Count de Guitry, deliberately turned his back upon the house, ignoring the dazzling show of beauty, looking only

into the eyes of one, and that one herself, absorbing himself in her. No one else interested him enough to turn his glance away from her even for a moment. It was the high note of chivalry, although it is doubtless true that she would have chafed under such absorption and called it a bore, if he had not already charmed her. So it is that each man must travel his own road to the lady of his heart. Whatever Guitry did from that moment but added to his fascination. It was he who discovered in her a likeness to a famous Nattier portrait, with this difference:

"If he had seen you we would have had a Nattier with a soul," he whispered.

Till then she had modeled herself insecurely, wavering with the fashion in maidens on and off the stage, cultivating now a voice a bit husky, again a pronunciation slightly Western, now a hearty, boyish grip of the hand, again a rather indifferent lackadaisical manner. Noting that someone with a marked personality pleased, she said to herself, "See me!" That was the slang of it even in her day, and she proceeded to efface her God-given characteristics, adopting, as though she were at the hairdresser's selecting a new ornament for her hair, those that were the natural endowment of another. The way the eyelids were lowered, the sudden opening of the eyes, a certain curious manner of turning, a quick nod of the head, awkward but much in vogue among leading ladies of the stage, a thousand tricks and quavers—she wavered among them and was almost lost until came the Count. It was he who had established her, showing her wherein the charm of individuality lay; accentuating her beauty, making of her a model instead of a copy. From then she knew the value of her high arched

brows, the fascination of her wide opened eyes, the beautiful line of her long neck that could stand to be encircled by a broad piece of velvet, the whiteness of it against the black. She wore dull blues and faded pinks. She combed her hair, that she had been tempted to tint with henna until the Count called it "*Cendré*," high from her slender neck. At last André de Guित्रy had even dared to let her know that when he looked at her he thought of a soft summer's day, of woody violets, of music in the distance—and then he had disappeared.

Kate sprang to her feet with tears in her eyes. Naturally she crossed over to her mirror, a graceful gold framed Venetian treasure, and paused. The impulse to see how she looks when anger or sorrow disturbs her equanimity is a feminine habit, and does not, in spite of skeptics of the other sex, lessen the force of these emotions. Any woman who recognizes that her vocation is to be charming learns early that her unhappiness is sure to increase with neglect of it. So, of course, she must be subconscious of it always.

The Count André de Guित्रy had returned to town. "I can't understand," Kate mused, "why he introduces this friend of his to every one but me. Everyone seems to have met him. Olmstead—a millionaire, a wit, M. de Guित्रy's most intimate friend!" The tears fell; she wiped them away; she passed from anger to anguish and back again, swept incontinently by the action of a man.

Her maid announced Mrs. Wallace Belknap.

A second later the women were in each other's arms.

They drew back to look at each other. Kate forgot her own emotions just for a second; she had never

seen Alice Belknap in that hat; either it wasn't becoming or ——

"Why dearest, what is the matter?" she cried.

"Oh, I'm so worried!" answered the other. "I've lost my necklace!"

Mrs. Belknap moved up the room towards the mirror where she too paused genuinely agitated, to lift her veil. "I haven't the slightest idea what I've done with it," she cried out in despair, and then went on to recall to Kate's mind that she had lost, only a few months before, a couple of very valuable trinkets.

"Have you called in a detective?" Kate asked at last.

"No, no." Mrs. Belknap had found among the gold brushes and boxes on the toilet table, the powder and a small ball of absorbent cotton tied with a narrow pink ribbon. She stood dabbing reflectively at her nose.

"But you should; you must!" said Kate. "This necklace may be a clue to the others."

"You don't understand, you don't understand," Mrs. Belknap repeated several times without offering to explain.

Kate crossed to the other end of the room and back to her visitor, who had flung herself on the couch. "Here, take these salts; my dear I'm so sorry; sit up and put your hat straight, do; let me ring for something! Have a cigarette. There, there; now tell me what happened."

"Well, I don't know!" Alice Belknap lit a match. "That's the bad part of it!" Then between puffs she started to tell all she did know. "I remember I had it on when that remarkable man, M. de Guity's friend, came into our box."

"André de Guitry's friend?" Kate feigned surprise, and questioned with an upward curve of her lips, looking lovelier than ever.

"Yes, Mr. Olmstead, the millionaire miner—you must have heard of him. No? It was Guitry who brought him into our box at the opera last night. Why didn't you go? Wonderful night! Eames at her best; I saw your mother there."

An instant's pause, and then Alice went on again:

"He's all over the place; most delightful; so different, so original; one might almost say he hadn't good manners if he weren't introduced by Guitry. Of course any friend of his—what do you think he told me?"

Her hostess sat on a straight chair and simulated a yawn.

"He looked at me for a few minutes silently, and then he said, 'Your necklace is magnificent but on you it is hideous!'"

Kate sat forward and smiled as any woman might.

"'Yes,' he said, 'You have a line'—and he made a big gesture like a sculptor, a foreign sculptor with red blood in his veins. Now don't think me conceited, Kate! 'It shouldn't be ruined,' he said, 'for the sake of a jewel.'"

"Which one was it?" asked Kate, striving hard to betray no special interest.

"Which line?" asked her dearest friend.

Kate smiled, one of those twisted superior smiles that women the world over call nasty.

"Oh, you mean which necklace? My emeralds! You know what they cost!"

Mrs. Belknap's despair broke out afresh. "I can't remember to save my life what I did with them!"

"Did with them? Did you take them off?" cried Kate with well-feigned surprise.

"Yes, I remember taking them off just to see how I'd look without them."

"Just to show the line," retorted the other.

"I can't remember whether I put them on again or not," moaned Alice Belknap. "Of course I must have, and I must have been careless about the clasp."

"Was Wallace with you?" asked Kate suddenly.

"No, no, if only he had been! That's one of the awful things. Ralph was with me." She paused for at least a second. Her lines drooped all they could. She was pathetic as she added, "And he has lost his position!"

"Your brother?"

"Yes! I don't dare tell Wallace——"

Alice Belknap's tears were genuine, welling up in spite of her. Her cigarette had gone out; she threw it aside.

"But I don't see," exclaimed Kate, "why you don't notify the detectives—why what is the matter?"

Her friend had broken down completely. "Oh that's the terrible part of it," she sobbed. "I don't know who has taken the old thing!"

"Of course not! If you did——" Kate paused, with a sudden sinking of her heart. Here was sorrow indeed! Scraps of gossip she had heard about a dissipated brother flew through her mind. She dismissed them to ask "Who is this man Olmstead anyway?"

"Why, my dear, who is he? Olmstead? Why he goes everywhere, everywhere. Every one knows him; why he was at Mrs. Cruger's tea, and at Mrs. Larabee's. She knows him well! And he's a lifelong friend of Guitry's, who worships him. You can see it by the way he watches him; he literally hangs upon

his words. And this Olmstead is rich—oh my dear—millions!”

“And I haven’t met him,” observed Kate softly.

“You must; he is extremely critical!”

“Would I pass muster?”

“Would he?”

“Tell me more.”

“He is very dark, very independent, brusque almost; he makes the most unexpected observations.”

“On any line!” interrupted Kate.

“Even on you!”

“He has heard of me? Tell me, what did he say?”

“Well I tried to interest him with tales of our most beautiful heiress and——”

“And?”

“He shrugged his shoulders——”

“He has never seen me!” Her hostess asserted it boldly, as a belle may, and she would not stop to have it contradicted. “He must!” she cried.

“I told him how good you were, how sympathetic; how interested in parks for the people, and things of that sort.”

“That was nice of you!”

Mrs. Belknap lit another cigarette, and in the pause Kate asked, “Well—and he?”

“You won’t mind?”

“Alice!”

She puffed in silence. “As if I cared what he said!” Kate remarked with disdain.

“Well then he said—really now—sure?”

“How silly! A man who is an absolute stranger—what difference does it make what he says?”

“He said it was a pose! There, now I knew you’d be angry! Forgive me!”

Kate Dunstan bounded to her feet. "What on earth—what impertinence! How does he know? What does the man mean? Pose! I the most natural of human beings? I, pose! From what you tell me he is a *poseur* himself!" And then, like any of her sex, she took the other side just as strongly. "How can one help posing in this world? What is one going to do if one has an imagination?" Then she balanced between the two sides for another second and said, "Besides strangers always judge wrong! I'll convince him! Pose, indeed!"

"Yes he says we all take up things for effect."

"What does he mean?" she asked.

"Oh you above all! There, now you're off again!"

"Not at all!"

"He said you couldn't live in such royal splendor, surround yourself with such a retinue of servants if you really pitied the masses. He said you'd be down in the slums with your pocketbook in your hand."

"How ridiculous!" cried Kate with an angry flush.

"I was so happy yesterday!" Alice Belknap exclaimed after a few moments.

"Absurd suggestion!" muttered Kate. Then suddenly—"Alice! How can one go down into the slums with one's pocketbook in one's hand? Is one to stand in the street?"

"Don't ask me; I've no money; he's enormously rich, interested in some charitable association; oh he's in that East Side arrangement, the Children's Court or something. That's how it all came up; he's going there this afternoon."

"This afternoon?" Kate glanced at the clock. "The Children's Court? I've heard Mamma speak of it," she said thinking aloud.

"He told me something about a newsboy in whom he is interested. Case comes up at two. I forget what it's about, but he's good."

"Who's good?"

"Oh, this Olmstead; and we're not; that's all there is to it. He said you wore such extravagant clothes."

It pleased Kate to think that he knew so much about her. Aloud she exclaimed, "Good heavens, am I to go about in rags?"

"Kate you know you look like some foreign Princess."

"Did he say so?"

Alice Belknap paused a moment. "He said you'd be an admirable Countess!"

"Why Alice! What on earth? I wonder if Guitry put in into his head!" Her voice rang through the room.

"Well, without a Count—why, Kate you're blushing!"

"Guitry and this Olmstead are always together—why hasn't he introduced me?" Kate threw herself at her friend's feet.

"Guitry?"

"Of course, Guitry!"

But Mrs. Belknap didn't want to be nice. "How can you think of him when I've lost my emeralds?"

"My dear I'm positive you've mislaid them. You'll find them. Alice, why didn't he introduce him to me?"

"It's a compliment," said Alice at last. "He's afraid!"

"Oh if I thought that!" The girl's face was transfigured, the blood leaped to her cheeks.

"Surely, a rich, distinguished rival! Naturally he doesn't want you to meet him."

"I wonder if a flirtation would bring him to his senses."

"Which one?"

"Both of them!"

"Kate you're incorrigible!"

"This Olmstead must be captivated; he must become interested!"

"In order?"

"Well that comes later," Kate said slowly.

"You know Guitry adores you!"

"He did once. Now he avoids me. I must know why; I must!" Kate Dunstan sat with her curving brows drawn together into a straight line, perplexed over a problem which Alice Belknap seemed to think she might assist in solving with suggestions as to her necklace.

"No," she said. "I couldn't have dropped it at the opera because I remember—yes, I think I seem to remember I had it on in the motor; perhaps the clasp was loose; but it wasn't, because when—No one must know I've lost it; remember Kate—it mustn't get out! Remember!"

"We must do something," Kate broke in with determination.

"To recover," murmured Alice nervously.

"Yes," interrupted Kate, nervously too, "André de Guitry! What have I done to make him avoid me?" she asked.

"And I thought you meant my emeralds!" Alice exclaimed with a touch of exasperation.

"Dearest! Your necklace is probably at home in your drawer. Telephone your maid! If I were as sure of Guitry," she cried.

"I tell you we've searched everywhere, turned every-

thing up side down. I can only remember taking it off."

"Oh you'll find it my dear; I hope you will." Kate paused, and then with studied carelessness resumed: "You think it would interest him if I should turn Lady Bountiful? I suppose Guitry will be with him this afternoon. Suppose you come too, with me!"

"You're going?"

"Perhaps," said she with a smile. "After all I have a conscience; and if these children—if I can help——"

"Oh!" Alice broke in suddenly, flying to the door. "The car," she called back, "I haven't searched the car!"

With that she disappeared leaving Kate Dunstan alone with one desire, one determination. She must see André de Guitry or, more important, he must see her. Where? How? Well, not there in her house. She had waited long enough for him to seek her there. After all she was a modern woman and an attractive one. This time, as she looked into her glass, she slipped the huge jade button of her gown out of its loop. She rang for her maid and then stood considering. Velvet or cloth? Cloth or satin? And still the ache in her heart kept on, a little less now for she had something to do, something with which to divide her misery. She decided upon a black cloth, a black hat, from under which one could just glimpse her curls, pulled down tight over her ears. There was a sob in her throat but she prepared for action thoughtfully, energetically. After all she was her father's daughter.

Arpad Dunstan was one of the grand army of rich men who claim, with their millions, superiority over

those who are less fortunate than themselves, not infrequently called, in millionaire praiseology, less able. Dunstan was a railroad man, who had the power to speak with authority of his lines, his cars, his men, etc. His eyes were a narrow slit, and very hard to look into. His speech eluded as they did. His wide mouth, courageously uncovered, turned down at the corners with codfish frankness, was the only frank expression about him. His figure was thick and broad and tall. His manner of holding himself indicated that the more space he covered the better he liked it. It may be that men submitted to getting out of his way simply because he didn't get out of theirs.

As a matter of fact the needs of his fellow creatures affected Arpad Dunstan so little that he consulted them only on strictly business lines. His roads were run to be successful. A hard, arrogant man he seemed to some people; to others, his wife and daughter for instance, an absent minded genius. He was the most generous of husbands, the most lenient of fathers, the most indulgent—but there, as we have lived we know that magnates, those most condemned of ordinary folk, those most despised by their employees, those that have shocked the public most profoundly, the most grasping and thieving of them share this praise in common, the familiar phrase—he is so good to his family!

Kate and her father had never had but one serious disagreement. It was when Arpad Dunstan had referred to M. de Guित्रy as a penniless adventurer. And this when the Frenchman's attentions to his daughter were most marked! For the first time the wills of the father and daughter had clashed. It had come to the point of the father's declaring that the

foreigner shouldn't have a penny of his fortune, when lo and behold, the foreigner, without any ceremony whatever, had renounced all claim to it by deliberately renouncing any claim to the heiress.

If Guitry had thought out a plan of action whereby he could most certainly attract the interest of Kate Dunstan, he could have hit upon none surer than his disappearance from her world, sudden, unexplained, and with apparent indifference as to consequences. It was a master stroke conceived in the fashion of so many master strokes that we applaud, by necessity. In the midst of a flirtation with one of the most beautiful women in New York, he couldn't have said plainer "*Bah, je m'en fiche!*"—with the effect we have seen upon one who had always, herself, controlled the last play in the game.

The heiress was stunned, but she denied to her parents the satisfaction of knowing it. From then till now she had set herself the task of referring to M. de Guitry with indifference. He had disappeared and Arpad Dunstan acted as though he thought his daughter had come to her senses. With that they had once more resumed the most loving relations.

Mrs. Dunstan followed on her husband's lines. She was one of the most amiable of women, but at the same time she was by no means a fool. The two are sometimes bracketted together because to be completely amiable suggests comparative inability to receive other than agreeable impressions. She was amiable with open eyes that she shut deliberately to preserve peace, peace of the present even if it excluded all possibility of peace in the future. Peace had become a mania with her. She pretended to believe that Kate had given up the Count in order to ease her own heart,

pretended to her husband that his will was Kate's law so that he would be placated. She made him believe that she was in her daughter's confidence when she quite realized that though they lived in the same house, they couldn't have been further from sharing each other's thoughts and feelings if they had been at opposite ends of the town.

"I'm glad he's gone, dear, since your father was so opposed to him," said her mother once in the very first days after the Frenchman's departure.

"Are you?" was all her daughter vouchsafed.

"He's the best judge," said her mother.

"Is he?" And André de Guitry's name dropped there to be avoided by them all, remaining, nevertheless, a sort of suspended menace, a sword of Damocles above their heads.

CHAPTER IX

THE Count de Guitry and Monsieur Alain were one and the same! The morning after she had made this startling discovery, the morning after Mrs. Cartwright's dinner, Ethel Blair sat at her desk—called by courtesy hers, for it was a desk that at any minute might be occupied by someone better at the job of collecting news and dispensing it.

M. de Guitry hadn't recognized her! Oh, if you are in the least incredulous, remember what a woman's hat may be! And she had presented herself under another name and in a gray suit, neat for business, practical for a blizzard, easily transformed by a touch for a reception. Every girl, who has ever earned her own living, knows the kind.

She was feeling very contrite, very humble, remembering how she had let her discovery slip through her fingers, after having been told to keep an eye on him, too. She hadn't even found out where he lived. Instead, she had just enjoyed herself; and how delightful he was—Mr. Olmstead this time. She had never met any one quite like him. Perhaps she had been cowardly not to tell him she was a newspaper woman, but when he had outlined his charming picture of her in a lace and satin boudoir, she just couldn't. She probably would never see him again. She sighed. She was glad she had looked her best! She smiled.

She had purchased the blue gown and the imitation pearls out of her first earnings, reasoning that they could easily go without a fire in the sitting room and postpone payment on the furniture, and even eat less if need be. Which tells you how young she was and how typical of her age. Her little faded mother had answered, "I reckon you know best!"

Mrs. Cartwright was from the South too, and had known Mrs. Blair in early days before—well before she had begun to collect her literary lions. That's as good a date as any, because before that no one had ever heard of her, and now she appeared very often in the social notes of newspapers. These items she supplied with unfailing regularity, declaring that she must sacrifice herself to help the "dear child."

The "dear child's" desk was of ordinary pine wood in the City room of a big newspaper, as dull and dingy a place, at this time of day, as the stage of a theatre between shows. Through a glass door Ethel Blair could see a scrub woman on her knees by a pail, mopping up the floor of the Managing Editor's room, empty now while the scene was being set for him. Her eyes followed a freckled, red-haired girl as she crossed over to where the Day desk, barricaded by newspapers, was plotting, planning, scheming, mis-casting.

But newspaperdom is no longer a place of mystery. Everybody knows that the editor of the Woman's Page is invariably a large athletic, bearded man, forever in his shirt sleeves, responsible at every Yule tide season for the fable of the single red rose that, to the heart of the working girl, brings happiness and joy greater than a string of pearls to a millionaire's daughter! And that the shabbiest person, she who

never comes into the office without tripping over the facing of her skirt, is the fashion editor. And that when a reporter has "fallen down" often enough on his own stories, he sits at a Copy desk and re-writes those of the undiscovered genius. And that it is the bachelor girl, born with an inherent scorn for cooking stoves and sewing machines, who tells you, for five cents, how to keep your husband happy, your baby healthy, and run your house on nothing a year.

Tales of My First Great Murder or How I Interviewed T. R., or When I Was Sent Out as Special Correspondent, Envoy or Representative, are to be had for the asking. But there are certain other ignominious moments, known to the initiated as "door step assignments," that tell of snubs and heartaches, of being thrown down and out, that are sealed and sacred, referred to in confidential whispers, only occasionally, among those who have also served and suffered.

Ethel Blair stopped counting the red-haired girl's freckles when she heard the City Editor say to her, "That was a crackerjack of a story you had on the front page this morning."

At that moment she envied her—freckles and all. If she could live to see a story of hers on the first page! And become a human being instead of a question mark!

The City Editor looked over at her, and it seemed to her he smiled. In that moment she decided, it being plainly her duty, to tell him of her discovery as to Monsieur Alain's indentivity, and ask his advice. She arose, and he said glibly, disregarding her salutation:

"Have a look in at the Children's Court; understand there's some child there whose story they refuse to

give out. And see Mrs. Belknap; she's trying to keep the loss of some jewels out of the papers. Oh, and stop in at the Dunstan's on your way (they were at opposite points of the compass). And ask Miss Kate if she turkèy trots or tangoes, and what she thinks of the Vice Crusade; and get a photo of her."

So, by the fraction of a second, the Man of Experience threw down the "scoop" that would have been as food and drink to him.

Ethel Blair slammed up the lid of her desk to hide her angry tears, and made up her mind that she'd not mention her big discovery till she got good and ready. "Good and ready" was just what she muttered, even if she did have literary aspirations. And she thought what a fool she'd have been to commit herself till she had found out all about the Count. Bother an editor with details? Not much! What did he know about society? The social game! That's what he called it. Why he'd have had her interview the Count de Guitry across the very dinner table, or follow him to his home and sit on his doorstep all night! What did he care?

With a sob in her throat and not a trace of ambition in her heart, even regardless that her hat was on crooked, Ethel Blair went out of the office. Every reporter, even a novice, knew that no one had ever landed a Dunstan interview. It was an assignment given out periodically in the hope that someone might be successful, given out only to newcomers who didn't dare refuse it.

Miss Blair took the longest route uptown and prayed all the way that the house had burned down in the night or that Miss Dunstan had left town forever. But the house was there, no mistaking it. It

covered two lots and had large D's woven into all its window curtains. She walked past it half a dozen times trying to screw her courage to the ringing point. She looked at it from every side, deceiving herself with the idea that she was planning some thing. She wasn't; she was only thinking miserably, "I must go up those steps and ring that bell."

She saw a machine drive up and she walked quickly on, then came back on the opposite side of the street, watching and waiting for it to disappear. Then she discovered it was in front of the next house. When she approached the front door again someone was passing; she walked on up and down and around, at least a dozen times. Photographed on her brain were all the important butlers and impudent parlor maids, who had opened all the other doors for her. Behind each one lurked a snub. She had tried being honest and announcing boldly that she represented a newspaper. They had no respect for newspapers. She had tried deception, and they had taken her for a book agent. They had a contempt for book agents.

At last she put her hat on straight, rang softly, waited trembling. And then the door opened. She had decided to be honest. The reward of virtue fell upon her ears. Yes, Miss Dunstan was at home. And the immaculate stiff-as-a-poker butler had asked her to step into the little reception room to the right. He hadn't shut the door in her face! He hadn't kept her standing on the door-step!

The blood rushed to her cheeks, and hope sprang high in her breast, as she found herself sitting on a high-backed gilt chair in a gilt cage. It was a Louis XVI room; spindle legs, spreading arms, curved backs. She took quick mental note of everything for

use as background for the big interview she would carry out with her. A lovely smiling photograph, signed Kate Dunstan, in a gilded frame seemed to lean graciously towards her.

She dreamed once more, a little troubled as to whether she should write the story in the first person. Fancy transported her on its wings, and she seemed to be a special reporter standing easily at the editor's desk, conferring with him in low tones. She was even telling him that she had found M. de Guitry, tracked him to his home, wherever that was. "Oh yes, I've landed him; surprised are you? Oh, I was quite sure I'd pull it off—why not?" She smiled as she realized how easy it was to fall into newspaper slang. "I didn't want to bother you with details till I had the story well in hand; you're going to give it a triple head? Why, of course, it's a bully scoop——"

And again a voice aroused her. The words it spoke brought her to her feet with a beating heart.

"I am never at home to agents or reporters. You should know better than to let one of them in. See if my father is in his office and then dismiss that person!"

Then and there Ethel Blair became a militant, an anarchist, an I. W. W.! She slipped the lovely photograph out of its frame——

A minute later Miss Dunstan came through the hallway, bent on rescuing criminals, and the butler, going to eject the undesirable person, found that she had disappeared without his assistance. He cast an eye over the little reception room and, being a butler, discovered nothing amiss. Nevertheless he determined, in the future, to be as exclusive in the matter of admissions, as a college fraternity club.

It gave one a sense of Arpad Dunstan's power just to see the guarded alcove at the end of the wide hall that led to it, and to know that the private offices there were used only for personal business. Half a dozen errand boys were always in attendance; a couple of uniformed servants tiptoed in and out. A ponderous mahogany door at the end of the passage swung incessantly to and fro, with messages from the magnate within to his menials without. Meanwhile at the front door, Arpad Dunstan's machine stood ready to dash with its owner to Wall street or the Bronx at a minute's notice. Wherever he went, whether to take an electric bath or to dine with friends, he was invariably discovered by a line of boys with messages, cables, telephone calls. Indeed, there was a well-founded report that, throughout the entire night, a machine stood outside the front door of his mansion. Another, vouched for by his admirers, insisted that he was in the habit of dictating to three stenographers at once.

Unannounced, his daughter paused at the threshold of his big, heavily wainscoted room. She was privileged, as indeed were all the members of his family and even some of his friends, for the magnate liked nothing better than to exhibit himself in the full display of his power and energy. He did a great deal of his business in public, traveling with three or four secretaries, and dictating in cabins and state rooms on boats and trains.

Kate took in her father's humor and the pile of letters that surrounded him at a glance, and said, in order to make a diplomatic beginning, "Poor Papa, so many letters!"

"M—yes," he grunted. "You'd think we ran a post office." He threw letter after letter on the floor.

"Why do you give me these things," he cried to his secretary. "What for? Am I an information bureau? Am I a column in some penny newspaper to answer questions? What in thunder have I got to do with all this? Who are these people? What are they to me? Monstrous, letting such things get to my eyes! Monstrous! What are clerks and secretaries for?"

The secretary, pale in the morning light, had evidently something to interpose in his own behalf; but the magnate thundred on, throwing down letter after letter. "What do I care about their opinions? Would I be head of forty companies if I paid attention to them? What do you give me these things for? Monstrous—monstrous. Here, take this message. Send this to the President. Hire a private wire to Cincinnati."

Arpad Dunstan pulled in for breath.

"But sir, you asked for your personal mail, and these were every one marked 'personal.'"

"Oh, that's the way they worm their way in, is it? Well, open them after this and throw them into the waste paper basket—every one of them—" With a big encompassing gesture the great financier swept them all but one onto the floor. His secretary, small by contrast if not by selection, stooped and gathered them into the basket. In that action he revealed, perhaps, the limits of his ambition, to live and die the subordinate of this or any bigger man.

Arpad Dunstan moved his cigar. "I can get those pearls I've been after," he said to his daughter, "I can get them and, at my price."

He picked up a single letter he had reserved out of the mass and read it over with gloating eyes. Then he let it fall and took from his vest pocket a small

case containing a few choice specimens out of his collection. From a bit of tissue paper he unrolled a pearl.

"See," he said to his daughter, holding up a magnifying glass. She came and stood at his shoulder. "And I've found its mate," her father murmured. A million dollar railroad deal would not have moved him more! "A match for it, mellow as this one; the same peculiar yellowish lustre, the same soft purity, from the same waters," he went on with real enthusiasm.

Kate knew her father's passion for precious stones, and his mood when he had succeeded in driving a bargain. She knew that she had come at the right moment. It was easy enough now to get what she wanted, though he seemed a trifle surprised at the nature of her request.

"The Children's Court?" he echoed. "Isn't that something new?"

"Well, I don't know that it's specially new; lots of people are interested in it." Her father played with the stones that were spread on the table before him. "Every woman I know is doing something, I mean something practical, something for the poor; why, it's almost conspicuous not to have some connection with the slums nowadays."

"But look at our list of charities!"

"I mean personally. I must begin somewhere."

"What's the matter with Sunday School?"

"No, no, I want to do some practical charity. Let me have the difference between your cleverness and the pearl dealer's stupidity!" she cried at last, with rare diplomacy, striking the vulnerable spot of the true collector's heart.

"And now I want an introduction to the Judge; please let someone find out who is presiding."

"That's easy," said Dunstan drily.

On her way out, Kate paused and bent over the basket of letters.

"What are they, Papa; begging letters?" she asked.

"They're the next thing to it; the snarls of the weak."

"The masses!" breathed his daughter.

"The army of incapables! Monstrous impertinence!" And with that Dunstan began to dictate furiously.

"The masses!" murmured Kate, taking one of the letters in her hand. "I would like," she read, "to call your attention, personally, to the great discomfort and the great injustice I suffered yesterday on your road. Your circular distinctly states, I quote from it, 'Train No. 18, Electric lights and dining car.' I purchased a stateroom for train No. 18 for those reasons. I had some special work to do that night and arranged to do it on the car. My eyes are not good and there was only one gas jet in the ceiling instead of the electric light guaranteed. I arranged to dine on the car. No dining car. Only a buffet, inadequately supplied because there had been a greater rush of people than was expected. Now, Sir, I beg—"

Kate dropped the letter and took up another. It was practically a duplicate of the first. She stooped again and again. She read of surly station masters who seemed to know nothing; of a breakdown where the victims could get no information from anyone as to the cause of accident, or the length of delay, or even if a trolley line ran near the scene; of misconnections,

of bad ventilation, of poor food and poor service, all apparently unnecessary hardships.

"Day after day, this summer," she read, "I came down from my little country place on your road, and, day after day, I got into a car, heated to boiling point, merely through the carelessness of your employees, who left it standing in the sun, hour after hour, before it was attached to the four-thirty express. May I beg that next summer——"

The secretary sat with his pencil suspended above his pad. His master for a second appeared to be thinking. He shot out his underlip and supported his large, black cigar.

"Are these true?" asked Kate.

"True?" echoed her father.

"I mean do these things happen?"

"Well, they think so apparently," he said with indifference.

"I don't believe them," cried his daughter impetuously. "They never happen when we travel——"

The secretary lifted his faded eyes while Dunstan grunted, and the big mahogany doors swung open and shut, and messengers came and went.

"But Father, why don't you look into these complaints?" asked the girl, after a second.

"When the receipts fall off I will," he answered.

"Receipts talk; that's pure American, isn't it?"

"I should think they'd——"

"What?" Dunstan leaned back in his chair, and puffed out a thick cloud of smoke.

"I should think they wouldn't travel on your road!"

"They've got to," he chuckled, "or stay at home."

"But their comfort——"

"Doesn't the road pay? What have I got superin-

tendents and conductors for? Let them look out for the cars, and the comforts."

"But they don't."

"How do you know? From those snarls, those growls? They aren't worth the paper they're written on," he cried. "Don't ever bring one of them into this room again, I tell you," he thundered to his secretary. "Why didn't you tear them up? What's a secretary for?"

Kate Dunstan made her escape, forced twice in one morning to think more about the masses than she had ever thought of them before in all her life. And half an hour later, her father was speeding down Fifth avenue at a rate that testified loudly to the stress of his business.

That was the superficial, public view of him. But as there are two sides to every man and a weak spot even in the devil himself, it is true that, before he went out, Arpad Dunstan, following an invariable habit, ran up the stairs to kiss Mildred, his wife for twenty-six years.

Twenty-six years ago he had found her, an unsophisticated girl, in a little New England town where they still had sewing circles and prayer meetings, and where they still thought that, with ignorance, the hearts of their children might be closed to temptation.

When Arpad Dunstan met his Mildred, she was a glowing beauty, concealing, even from herself, under a timidity born of strict chaperonage, her desire for gayety, attention, flattery. Arpad Dunstan came along and offered them all to her, and in order to acquire them, she acquired him. And this without analysis. She was sublimely happy at that time, in love with

the love she had inspired in one, who, even then, before he had conquered an army of weaker opponents, was possessed of a certain brute strength and independence. In comparison with the men she had known he was all-powerful, all-absorbing. But at that time her capacity for comparison was limited.

Years passed and now, when comparison had expanded to the ripe judgment of maturity, now, long after she had acquired that feat popularly called 'living,' now when he had gone, under her very eyes, from success to success, she admired him more than ever. She admired him with all her femininity, and loved him still for his love of her, which is more than feminine, being human too. Like thousands of wives, old fashioned perhaps, she permitted herself to see only one side of the man she lived with, the other didn't concern her. She gloried in his power. She closed her eyes if he were impatient or dictatorial, and opened them with pride at the ease of his conferences with the greatest men of the nation.

She was waiting for him in what she called her living room, a place quite unlike her daughter's very French boudoir; a room with quiet walls of dull brown; with big, recessed windows, holding boxes filled with bright flowers, a glowing fire in the deep grate, plenty of comfortable chairs, quantities of books and very few useless ornaments.

At that hour she was there to greet him with a smile. Presently she raised her head to say, "Tomorrow you go on your Western trip?"

"You'd have me stay?"

"No, no, only—" She was wondering if he knew the Count de Guित्रy had returned, rather hoping that he'd leave town without hearing it, thinking vaguely

that since the Frenchman hadn't called perhaps everything would come out all right.

"What is it, love?" her husband asked. She put him off with the word, "nothing." And they drifted into talk about summer plans, the boys, their camps, their sailing dates, and from that into the commonplace jargon of household arrangements.

"By the way," he said abruptly, "Kate's just been telling me she wants to visit the Children's Court."

Mrs. Dunstan was genuinely surprised. It was the first she had heard of it, but while waiting to hear more she only asked, "Interested in that, is she?"

"No, she isn't," the father answered, smiling with the expression of one who intended to convey that he was nobody's fool. "But she's going there this afternoon," he added.

"This afternoon?" Mrs. Dunstan paused and then said, "Oh, I'm sorry, it's my day at the hospital!" quite as though Kate had every intention of taking her with her.

"Well, she's got something up her sleeve; I don't know what—yet."

Dunstan walked up and down the room, and his wife had an uneasy feeling that he hadn't told her what was really on his mind. Suddenly he threw it at her in a single sentence.

"Why didn't you tell me about that adventurer?" he began. She trembled at the word so violently that at once he repented having used it. Knowing her as the average husband knows his wife, her agitation seemed to him entirely natural.

"Well, you know who I mean," he said.

Her lips were dry.

"No French Count can have my daughter!" he declared.

She recovered to say, "I wondered if you knew he was back; he was at the Opera."

"You forgot to mention it."

"It wasn't important. I noticed him because he was there with a handsome young man, a rich Australian, I understand. Now, if I were a girl——"

"Oh, if Kate were only more like you! She's so complicated."

"We must give her time!" said her mother uneasily.

"Time—nonsense! You were always dignified, simple, correct." There was no doubt that he admired her!

"Well, Kate knows what I think of this Guitry," he said at last, quite as though he had said, "That settles it."

"Of course," she answered.

"Don't worry," said he, turning back at the door to reassure her. "It will come out all right."

"Of course," she repeated, with a little toss of her head, "she's your daughter." And from then she made up her mind to watch, invaluable assistant to the deepest faith as even the firmest believer knows.

"Dignified, simple, correct"—the adjectives resounded mockingly in her ears. Then they seemed to die, and the room became polluted with the term "adventurer," as it had fallen from her husband's lips. A curtain lifted. Her whole body quivered and her mind was forced back, back to a day when she had realized that word for the first time in its full significance. The recollection drove her to uneasy pacing up and down. But the recollection remained. She

couldn't efface it. Feelings long since dead and buried seemed to spring to life.

She had once been as weak as any woman in love. She clung even now to the words "in love"; and repeated them over several times. For if a woman doesn't yield one may always revert to the question—was she in love? She recalled the great love affairs of women of different nations, from Helen of Troy to Mary of Scots; from Eleanore Duse down to the hideous story of the lovely Italian princess who, after having broken with her lover, frightened by him with threats of blackmail, had responded to his demand for money. She had suffered death, worse than death—exposure.

Adventurer! Had her husband used it with covert meaning? Was there any hidden suspicion lurking behind the word? Trembling, as one discovered, she pushed open the door to his dressing room and stood looking at the familiar objects there, the mass of gleaming toilet articles on the mahogany dressing stand, the luxurious silver mounted shaving glass, the paraphernalia of cabinets and brackets. Her eyes skimmed them over. They were not what she had come to see. She looked beyond them. The blood rushed back to her heart and suffused her cheeks in a glorious flush. In every available space on the painted walls she saw herself. Triumphant in her wedding gown of voluminous satin; sedate, a matron with two lovely children; serious, a housewife at her desk; dignified in a ball gown in the days when she could wear to advantage a round low neck; none but pictures of her in that room which was exclusively his.

A small vase with flowers, selected by her, stood on his dressing table. His curtain was crooked, she

noted that. She looked sideways at the bureau and saw that a careless maid had left the surface of the drawers streaked. She burst into tears and then as quickly recovered.

She flew back to her own room and removed every trace of them. After these years to break down! All her pride rushed to her rescue banishing weakness, restoring composure, even permitting self-respect.

Oh, she had suffered! If that was exacted from her by an all-forgiving God she had paid the penalty. She held up her head, threw back her shoulders. She felt ennobled by her suffering, for she had borne alone and secretly all the anguish of it.

Years before she had recovered from a love stroke to go through a period of shame, of agony, of rage, of fear. A period of shame when her first thought had been to ask for forgiveness, to grovel at her husband's feet, as in those days the transplanted Frou-Frous and Fernandes were wont to grovel; of anguish when it seemed to her that her moment of weakness, confessed or unconfessed, was a barrier never to be thrown down, an obstacle forever to stand between them, a chasm never to be bridged, a sin never to be atoned for. If, at this penitential time, her husband had not been away on one of his frequent business trips her confession would have been inevitable.

The period of anguish and shame endured for days. For days she went about pale and wan, hovering over her children, clasping them to her heart, leaning over their cribs in the dark of night with streaming eyes. She prayed as she had never prayed before; repentant prayers for guidance and strength, for strength to leave where her presence might bring unhappiness,

misery, despair; for strength to steal out and never return.

Then a period of rage crept in between the shame and anguish, an awful moment of revulsion in which her soul cried out—"How could I? I must have been mad, hypnotized! To put myself in the power of a man like that—a man so weak, so small."

The return of reason—revulsion remained; shame and anguish lessened. For whose good was she going away? For her own? For his? For her children's? Her children! Who could he get to love them as she did? To care for them as she could? To care for him as she could now? Now, if she had the chance—the chance——

To this succeeded a period of nerves, starting at every sound, expectant every minute of a revolution in the house, in the street; always waiting, fearing. Every time the doorbell rang she started, the coming of the postman seemed to herald pursuit. She shunned her friends; she scanned the newspapers, trembling, always on the edge of a precipice. Prepared for anything, nothing happened. Silence—complete and absolute.

Confession is good for the soul. "But for whose soul?" she queried at last. Those women who confessed and so jeopardized the peace of their homes—why did they? Why? Because they were narrow, old fashioned, selfish, weak, cowardly, yes, cowardly; confessing, nine times out of ten, through fear of being found out. 'Absurd! In real life people's sins did not find them out. That was a contrivance of drama or fiction. On the stage, of course, sin, like crime, must lead somewhere—to a penultimate scene of tragedy or pathos, but in real life—a sensible, dis-

creet woman could live out her days unsuspected of anything she cared to hide. Good heavens, she was not the only woman who had loved and recovered! She thought of her friends, of her acquaintances. In her mind she named them over—gay, sad, mysterious. Who knew what their souls secreted? Was there suspicion of them? And if there were, what of it? What had the world to do with them, with her? Here was her world!

Her duty became clearer day by day—her duty to her home, to her husband, to her children, to herself. As she found herself, day by day safer and safer, she asked herself, more and more ardently, why they should suffer. What she had contemplated in her weakness became, more and more, a fearful thing, cowardly, unmoral, dastardly, selfish. Some women bore the marks of such a passion as hers forever. Not she! She gave more attention to her wardrobe, became more beautiful, more charming, finer, better, more generous, more charitable, till at last she had won completely; not even a scar was left to remind her.

Her husband returned to find her a trifle thinner; there was a more serious look in her face, perhaps. She seemed older, more responsible, less eager, finer, more solicitous of his comfort. He found new charms, and he realized that she had missed him. That was all. She saw him content, rugged, hearty, glad to be home, loving and loved, unsuspecting. Arpad Dunstan loved her! And above all she had learned to love him, and to thank the good God who had given her the strength to keep for him his home and his happiness.

CHAPTER X

OLMSTEAD smiled when he recognized in the lady sitting near the Judge with a mahogany barrier rising between her and crime, the beautiful Kate Dunstan. She was, in the first place, charming to look upon, and then he had the satisfaction of knowing that he was at least somewhat responsible for her presence there. In a jumbled note about her lost necklace and her despair, Mrs. Wallace Belknap had informed him that he had marvelous power, and wouldn't he help her find it? For it meant more to her than he could dream; and Kate Dunstan was actually, she believed, going to follow his suggestion, though of course it wasn't exactly a suggestion, and go to see the children in their court. She hoped he would be there.

Yet on the surface, where most people flit, this day at the Children's Court droned along monotonously, the same as any other day. Not a hint of any connection between these two, so intensely conscious of each other's every movement, was even suspected.

The scene was set as it had been hundreds of times, just as if it were to serve no purpose but justice.

Dirty, ragged, wretched, tearful, rubbing one bare foot against the other in agonized protest, the criminal at the Bar was that bad boy who has no respect for park ordinances when the cop's back is turned. He

breaks them just the same as though he owned an automobile and were fond of speeding and had the money to pay a fine. Olmstead could picture his home in that district where half a dozen sleep in one room, where rag mattresses serve for beds and any old thing for covering, where cracks are stuffed with papers in winter and alive with insects in summer, where fire ordinances and health ordinances and police ordinances are broken constantly by those more clever than he at eluding arrest—but this was not the time for such distractions of thought.

Under his eyes the millionaire's daughter was conferring with the judge, and gathering his wits together, he realized that this small victim must be regarded merely as a cog in the wheel of opportunity.

In this undistinguished room with its bare walls, unrelieved by any decorations mythological or symbolical, the sobbing, shabby delinquents—indifferent, criminal, degenerate, frightened, shy, stupid, dull, sentimental, even sensitive (all still at the age called golden), the officers of the law, the pettifogging lawyers, the straggling spectators, the degenerate hangers-on, the reluctant witnesses, the reprehensible parents, the indignant complainants only concerned him in so far as they concerned his future—not theirs.

Awakened by Guitry to the value of philanthropy as a social asset, Olmstead had shown Mrs. Belknap the newsboy's appeal. At most, he had thought to impress himself upon her as a reformer, missionary, philanthropist; he had never expected this wonderful result. In fact, if it hadn't been for Mrs. Belknap's note, he might not even have been there himself. Now that he was there let him not lose sight of the purpose of his visit. So pass the little snub nose girl who

doesn't want to work and likes the streets at night; pass the lad who is too young to have a license and who yet, thrown on his own resources, dares try to make a living without one; pass the bad boys who break windows and play craps; pass the small burglars who can't escape sentence—pass on to the case of Jimmy McCarty, newsboy.

He had been caught with the evidence of his crime in his hand. Blatant, appalling, damning evidence—"A pumpkin pie," said the accusing baker person, "ruined for trade—and more than that, there is the principle."

The records said he was twelve, but by the laws of starvation he looked half this number of years. Miss Dunstan peered over the desk at him. His face was streaked with tears, and black because he kept wiping it with a dirty hand, until at last he caught sight of Olmstead. Then he straightened up. The learned judge looked uncomfortable, and shifted in his seat as he read the charge. "Petty larceny—six in the morning—a delivery wagon heaped with pies, cakes, bread." He tried to make it sound commonplace. He mumbled as he read and broke his sentences off short. "Previous record"—then it came out that the small criminal was an old offender, had been up before for the same offence; ragged as now, dirty as now. Jimmy sold newspapers; Jimmy had an aunt; she was beside him sobbing at the mention of it, but the aunt took his money and occasionally forgot to provide for him, forgot indeed to come home. She had forgotten this time, and he had had no money to buy papers, and in three days he had had only scraps and the pie he had helped himself to.

Olmstead made quick mental review of the situation.

There was no doubt, of course, that the little criminal would be let off; the damage would be next to nothing, and the aunt was there to take charge of him. He looked at the judge, tired, worn, dull; he looked at Jimmy, and then he approached the rail and asked permission to speak.

"Your Honor," he began apologetically—"it's my fault that the boy is here, mine alone. If I had given him food it would never have happened."

"You know this boy?"

Olmstead hesitated. Jimmy's eyes, ablaze with gratitude, sought his. Miss Dunstan's gaze, full of interest, was upon him.

"Well, no, not exactly; the same sort of introduction has passed many a time between any man and any boy. He sold a paper to me one evening in the street; he was in rags; he looked much as he does now."

Very modestly Olmstead told how he had given the boy a few pennies and bidden him come back for more when he needed them. He acknowledged, contritely, that then he had forgotten all about him. The boy had come to his hotel but they wouldn't let him in. "You must have a certain costume to pass in there," he said very seriously. "So, Your Honor, I'm to blame, as all of us are to blame who have food, for the sins of those who sin because they are hungry——" It was out before any one could stop him. He pulled up short but his eyes had riveted Kate Dunstan's.

There was a stir in the court room; the clerk rapped for order. Olmstead apologized, and presently he was begging permission to go on the boy's bond, to make amends to his accuser.

Not three minutes later, before the case was dismissed, what he had planned had come to pass. Under

the unseeing eyes of rag-pickers and push cart merchants, pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers, Olmstead was conferring with Miss Dunstan. He had learned from her such familiar facts as who she was and how she had known who he was. She asked, fervently, to be allowed to assist in caring for the boy; she promised to take him into her service if the court were willing. It was finally agreed that the boy should go to see her the following day. Then, before she and Olmstead could exchange half a dozen words more, the law interposed and he found himself drawn aside for further consultation with the small criminal, his repentant aunt, and the injured baker. After a first moment of irritation at the interruption he recovered his equanimity, and looking down upon the scared urchin, he said, smiling: "You've served me well." Which was as Greek to his tiny listener.

And then something happened to distract him. He caught sight of a girl with flaming cheeks, a girl in a simple little gray suit that was certainly suitable for this occasion, a girl who at that moment was vowing inwardly that never again while she had to ferret out news for a living would she accept an invitation into society, that never again would she meet socially any one who might by any possibility turn into a "story." Perhaps he wouldn't recognize her—perhaps—but he turned, paused and smiled just as he had smiled upon her a couple of nights before, and held out his hand like an old friend.

"I was there," she blurted out. "I heard you! It was splendid! You are all I thought you—and more!" She was genuine in her enthusiasm.

"You are with Miss Dunstan?" he asked. That was the first thought to account for her presence.

"No, no, I— You remember me?"

"Why of course I remember you! The writer!" Remember her! How could he help it? But he must join Miss Dunstan, alas, for business. This girl was strangely attractive! He hesitated——

And then she told him who she was. She grew crimson as she explained why she was there. "I should have told you that night," she said contritely, "when you believed I had no axes to grind—I've nothing else."

No wonder she had been so sympathetic to him. Now he understood! And to prove it he translated what she wanted of him into language more blunt than is customary.

"I'm worth money to you!" But he smiled with such good humor as he said it that she couldn't resent it.

"You are of interest to the public," she exclaimed.

"Really?" he observed, noting again the delicate whiteness of her lids.

Meanwhile Miss Dunstan had moved towards the door.

"I wonder if you would let me have a photograph—I promise to return it if you would," said Miss Blair.

This girl, standing there with flushing cheeks, represented to him suddenly an opportunity he couldn't afford to let slip. She cried out to him the watchword of his day—"Publicity!" Looking at her he heard, as if some one had actually spoken the words, "Working the press." Through her he might float just such paragraphs as he might need to further his interests. His duty, he told himself joyfully, lay at her side. Miss Dunstan could wait.

"Tell me please something about yourself," Miss Blair petitioned him.

"Well what?"

"Oh, everything!"

Olmstead laughed, and they stood looking into each other's eyes.

"Why I'm from 'Australia,'" he said presently. "You've heard of my gold mines there—no? Well of course I'd sooner you didn't refer too much to my private fortune. People might think I was boastful, millionaire will do." She looked at him, radiant.

"It was splendid what you said. It will read as a sermon to the rich from a——"

"From one of them; every one knows me. I suppose you know my reputation," he continued easily, having made up his mind that she was to assist him in establishing that at least.

"No—I—" she was really embarrassed not to know more about him.

"Well, it doesn't matter; I thought perhaps you had heard that I've a reputation for independence that amounts almost to rudeness."

"May I use that?"

"Why, yes, if you think it's interesting," he said with studied modesty. "It was I, you know, who remarked to the Princess Chimay, 'Vulgarity begins at home and should be allowed to stay there.' Others have claimed it, but it was I who really said it first!"

"Oh, that's clever," she cried.

"You like those things?" he asked as though he had a stock of them in reserve. "Well, before we're through be sure to ask me to tell you the story of the Western woman, the famous milliner, and myself. Oh it was rich!"

He saw with satisfaction that she made mental note of it for future use, asking meanwhile: "Where do you live usually?"

"Everywhere," he began and then broke off suddenly, saying, "My home in South America is rather famous; you see I own the original Lovers' Field, a field of daisies in the season of daisies!" He smiled as he seemed to recall it stretched out in the sunlight.

The girl waited, intensely interested.

"Any Marguerite may wander there," he resumed, "with her Faust, and pull the leaves off the daisies, one by one, without fear. Every daisy in my field will say, 'He loves me'; never—'he loves me not!'"

"But how?"

"My gardener's secret! I have a lawn where one has only to stoop to find a four-leaved clover. From the side of my brook I have banished the weeping willow."

"I think you'll be a Sunday story!" Miss Blair glowed hopefully. "But first I must ask you a great many questions, may I?"

The court had adjourned. Miss Dunstan had disappeared, and those who were free were making their way into the sunshine where there waited for those who weren't, the first hideous hint of their reformation.

"Oh do tell me some more," said Miss Blair, suddenly beginning to fear that Olmstead would slip away from her.

This—while he stood making up his mind that she must not escape. He paraded his most recent gastro-nomic discovery. "Can't we go somewhere and have tea while we chat?" he asked.

The girl was silent for a moment, then recalling

that after all she had met him socially, she said: "I live just near here in a tiny little apartment with my mother. She'll be so pleased——"

There flashed to her mind the shabby little front room where he would sit, her faded little mother who invariably met her at the door with—"Anything new?" Which meant: "How are we going to pay the rent? Winter is here—coal is dearer than ever—you can't go about any longer in a straw hat——"

She summoned all her courage to say: "It's just around the corner and we could have tea; and you could tell me every thing from the beginning. You see I haven't been in New York long, and I'm always looking out for a big story."

He assured himself that he would take her quite impersonally, merely as a medium to get into print only what seemed wise and important. As she walked ahead of him, very slight and erect, with her hands thrust deep in her pockets, it seemed to him she wasn't exactly graceful—in fact she was awkward. She wasn't exactly beautiful—but he was fast leaving the stage of analysis.

They turned into a side street filled with school children, and flats made over from houses that had seen better days. Some of them had cards over their door-bells to announce that they had rooms to let. At the end of the row they were tearing one down revealing the secrets of its closets and stairs and wall papers.

"How little we know of each other till the barriers are down!" he exclaimed.

To which she answered, "Indeed but I'm glad you know the truth about me now!"

He wished she wouldn't say things like that.

"You see," she went on, "I didn't expect to know

you any better, so I didn't mind deceiving you; it always makes a difference when you know people, above all when they're nice to you and—" she paused and put her finger on a button above a letter box. The door clicked open and a voice over the banisters called out: "Anything new?"

"Yes," she announced, and one could hear a note of triumph in her tone. "I'm bringing a gentleman to have tea with us."

The voice disappeared but the door was left hospitably open, and somehow, Olmstead, entering the unpretentious room for the first time, felt that he was in the home of a lady. Plenty of books and magazines, a couple of plants, a canary singing, a soft carpet, a few old chairs, some prints of good pictures, cream-white curtains, no jarring colors and—Miss Blair.

"Welcome to my boudoir," laughed the girl. "My butler is out for the day!"

"You're not a bit the reporter type," he insisted, looking about him, "not a bit."

"What's wrong?"

"You've no note book, and you're not disheveled, nor frowsy, nor threadbare!"

"Oh, you've been reading about us," she said with a little deprecatory shrug. "They always forget to mention that most of us are accidents—rejected MSS and no incomes grew us! And some of us have a mother. One mother can upset a whole cartload of canned traditions."

With the tea the voice reappeared. It belonged to a kindly, gray haired, most respectable lady who greeted him hospitably, and then faded out of sight on hearing that Mr. Olmstead had graciously consented to be interviewed.

They chatted for a few minutes about neighborhoods and settlements, and the dinner at which they had met, and the costume party where they hoped to meet again.

"Now you know why I demurred about jewels," she said laughing. "I'll be at the ball but I'll be there to report the costumes!"

"I shall see you before then," he declared.

"Another interview perhaps; but now this one——" Somehow he hadn't the same zest for it. He hardly knew why, except, perhaps, because the little room seemed so wholesome, and the girl so genuine and friendly and trustful. It wasn't such fun telling her stories that weren't so. However he said, "Go ahead, ask all you want. I've nothing on till dinner time."

The girl looked at him reflectively while he sat balancing his cup. He noticed that it was green with a little chip on one side that showed white underneath.

"Have you been to the opera?" she asked, casting about.

"Last night," he said with a sense of importance, "in Mrs. Belknap's box."

"Oh, I do hope it isn't true that she's been robbed again! I've been trying to find out for the paper. They say she has——"

"Do they?" he asked lightly.

"Yes, poor soul."

"Why, poor soul?" His tone was almost harsh as he remarked, "She can afford it."

"But that's not it! You see she has a brother——"

"That might happen to any woman!"

The girl ignored the frivolous tone of the suggestion. "She is devoted to him, yet in her heart she isn't sure of him. She brought him up." She went on to tell him a sordid little story of a young boy and a beautiful

girl, poor and alone. The girl had married a very rich man, years older than herself. And then she had given her brother his chance. With his first money he had plunged into dissipation and debt. The husband had behaved like a brute——

"Because the boy drinks and plays cards, and is poor, people seem to think he may be guilty of other things that are worse, of theft even; that's the way people are." The girl had become very serious.

"It seems that Mr. Belknap has threatened, if anything more was missing, to accuse the brother; and even if he isn't guilty it would ruin him. Oh, I can understand how his sister feels! Sad, isn't it?"

"Well, isn't that what you reporters call a big story?" brutally asked Olmstead.

"Oh yes, but you see I know Mrs. Belknap, and I know her brother; he's rather foolish and very young—just at the turning point."

Olmstead took a sip of tea and said, "I know her too."

"Of course, if you were in her box last night."

"How are you going to find out about it?" he asked after a moment.

"Well, I don't know. I've been to her house three times—of course she won't see me; I wrote on my card what I wanted."

Olmstead grunted at what seemed to him an absurd method of approach.

"What next?" he asked.

"Well, there's a *matinée*, she might be there——"

"To be sure."

"Yes, *Lohengrin*; I looked it up. Mrs. Belknap—odd *matinees*. Now to go back," she resumed in her most business like tone, "You were saying——"

"Suppose you find out that she has lost something, what will you do?" he persisted.

"Oh I shan't find it out," the girl answered without a hint of dissatisfaction.

"You must be a pretty bad reporter," he observed.

"Well," she said defiantly, "and suppose I am?"

In the simplest way in the world he answered: "But I guess you're a pretty good kind of woman."

She sat looking at him now with the gaze of a grateful animal.

"And that's better," he said at last. Later he added to himself—"A damned sight better."

All this time something had been going on inside of him—something very new and strange. Really it was so unusual a feeling that he attributed it first to something he had eaten. It was a sudden revulsion, anyway, in the midst of unqualified success. He had pulled off a big stroke of business the night before, a perfectly safe "investment." At the time when it presented itself he hadn't been able to resist it. But this story about the brother—why he hadn't intended to harm Mrs. Belknap, he had merely intended to take, without her leave, something she could well do without. He had it in his pocket at that moment. With comparatively little danger to himself he had annexed it, and, most amazingly, he sat now regretting it. What the devil was wrong? He heard Miss Blair saying, "It's really true that a reporter should avoid making friends——"

She broke off abruptly. Why on earth was she explaining, apologizing? Why, except that he was the most interesting man that she had ever met, impelling her with sympathy, with understanding? And he—for the first time in his life he was receiving the con-

fidence of a woman who had confidence enough in him to give it.

Suddenly he put down his cup, arose, and moved towards the door.

"I must go," he said. "I mustn't miss this performance of Lohengrin!"

"Oh, you said you had all afternoon!"

"I know, but Mrs. Belknap asked me to drop in and—well I owe it to myself—and to her!"

A minute later the door closed behind him.

"Finished?" asked the mother's voice in surprise.

"We should have had more hot water—the tea was too strong," answered her daughter with marked irritation.

"There's plenty on the stove." Mrs. Blair appeared at the door. "How many columns will it make?"

"I don't know where he was born—or how long he's here for—or whom he's related to—or— And he didn't tell me that story about the Western woman! But I do know where he's going!"

Miss Blair put on her coat with an air of determination.

"I don't think it's dignified," began her mother.

Her daughter answered nothing for a moment. Then she said—"I'm a newspaper woman; we have to pay the rent."

"I know, but to run after a man——"

"A man! Nonsense! He's only the means to an end."

And Ethel Blair went slowly out.

CHAPTER XI

PERHAPS a couple of hours later, keeping time to the wedding march from Lohengrin, Olmstead swung into Fifth avenue. He had the air of a man perfectly satisfied with himself, as though he had just completed something big and important. A woman passed and bowed to him. He raised his hat. Unconsciously he threw back his shoulders taking a sort of pleasure in the fact that he was a new kind of man in a new world, a world that he had ridiculed and reviled when he was out of it, in common with the average outsider and much for the same reason—he had never expected to get in. The woman's recognition made him feel that he belonged. He hadn't the faintest idea who she was, but she knew him. She was good looking, due in all probability to the fact that she had on such expensive clothes. He liked her elegance, her look of refinement, though only a few days before he would have been resentful of them. Today the contemplation of her rather added to his pleasure. Indeed he seemed to be changing his personality as he had changed his habits and his friends.

Automobile horns sounded their warning, tires burst like cannon shots in his ears, policemen in command of the traffic whistled shrilly, an ambulance clanged insistently as he climbed up some wooden steps over

a temporary platform, past a structure destined some day to provide comforts where now it interfered with them. In silent rage at the gathering crowds in the narrow space pedestrians passed around the platform, others climbed it grumbling, declaring their disgust to their fellow sufferers. Olmstead with his new, queer feeling of satisfaction, stepped gayly into the crowd. He looked over their heads, and then abruptly stood still, staring wide-eyed at what they surrounded. The limp figure being lifted into the ambulance was a familiar one. The mottled face with the blue lips lying against the doctor's arm was the face of Hackett. His eyelids fluttered, his lips moved. Olmstead leaned forward trying to catch, if possible, the words that fell from them. As he stood there irresolute, fearing there might be danger in claiming acquaintance with a shabby man who had fallen in the street, he gathered from the crowds the nature of the accident. It was the man's heart. He had fainted, tumbled down in a heap; he was too weak to tell where he lived. Olmstead remained staring while they lifted the huddled figure into the ambulance. He noted the name on its door and followed across town.

Just ahead of him a girl stood at the registrar's desk, her eyes red with weeping, her dress poor. "They should have let me know," she sobbed. "He died among strangers—I know—I know what that means"; and all the power of the registrar couldn't stop her from knowing.

Olmstead knew too, for all he had been young when he learned. The smell of iodoform floated down to him out of the past. He could see the long bare wards with the rows of iron beds all numbered, with their coverings stretched taut and white revealing the grim

outlines of strange forms; he could see the charts hanging above their restless, tossing, helpless, placid, fevered, unconscious heads, records of their diseases—serious, horrible, trivial, uncertain, banishing reticence for all the free—poor—alike. He could feel again the crude uncertain touch of the probationer relieving the overworked graduate, learning her trade among the wards for the free—word of mockery in the language of the poor. He could see the important young doctors on their rounds getting their experience from the same free!

He looked into the past, beyond the young girl ahead of him sobbing and repeating over and over the refrain—"He died among strangers——" and saw a screen, the mysterious uncanny herald of the last hours of a case. Number 21 it was, a number forever to linger in the mind of number 16—the boy Olmstead. He remembered waking suddenly one night. In the dim light of the ward he had seen a white paneled screen hurriedly pulled out to shut in number 21, just beyond. He leaned on his elbow and heard the awful sound of deep drawn breathing. Some one muttered near him, "He's dying"; another prayed, while the boy watched and listened and wondered. The girl's father had passed that way behind a screen, among strangers, in the free ward of a hospital. She knew what it meant and he knew. And now his father would know.

He followed her at the registrar's desk where he found all the hospital red tape wound around and around in a little tight ball. The human being for whom he inquired had already become a case. It had not yet been registered; its ward was still to be assigned; visitors' hours were over for the public wards; yes, he could telephone later.

"What is the next visitor's day?" Olmstead repeated the question sharply, and at the minute he seemed to revert from his new personality to his old self. He wondered what would happen if he were to shoot out his right hand into the fellow's stolid, indifferent face. But the registrar had apparently forgotten his existence. He was looking far beyond him, bowing deferentially to a lady passing through the hall.

Olmstead's glance followed his, and then instantly he wished it hadn't, for it seemed unwise to be recognized when he stood there inquiring for some one consigned to the free ward. The lady certainly appeared to know him; he saw her look and look again. Then—yes, she was coming towards him.

"Can I be of any assistance?" she asked. "I'm one of the patronesses here."

The registrar explained deferentially. And Olmstead assigned to Hackett in the stress of the moment, the position of a devoted valet. He had been with him so many years, he added, that he had kept him on in spite of a serious heart trouble. Some one had told him of the man's seizure, bad new travels quickly, and he wanted to see if he was comfortable. That was all.

The lady was a patroness and a powerful one it seemed. At her bidding doors were opened, messages were dispatched, and even physicians were summoned. By a strange freak of fate here was one of the enemy, one of the lazy rich, displaying her powers, and he wasn't in the least resentful of them. By her side he found himself presently in the director's room.

"We shall have to wait while they locate your man," she said. "It will only take a few minutes, mean-

while let me introduce myself. I am Mrs. Dunstan. I saw you last night at the opera, with one of my daughter's friends, M. de Guित्रy."

Mildred Dunstan! Oh the irony of it! He stood staring at her with her check in his inside pocket. Then he recovered to say that he had just met Miss Dunstan at the Children's Court.

"The Children's Court!" she echoed. "Are you interested?"

He made light of it and told her the story of the newsboy.

"And my daughter, what was she doing there?" she asked.

"Such interesting work!" he exclaimed with one of his swift smiles.

Instead of answering Mrs. Dunstan said with total irrelevance: "You know M. de Guित्रy well then?"

"My most intimate friend," he answered.

"I see—I see——" she said slowly. Then without explaining what it was that she saw, she asked: "And is M. de Guित्रy interested in the children too?"

"Oh Guित्रy has so many interests. I did expect him to meet me today but he couldn't."

"Ah, I see—I see," she repeated.

And suddenly it flashed upon her that she must get into this swiftly moving game somehow even if she, too, had to come in on the well worn hand called charity. She turned and gave some directions, from which he gathered that Hackett was to be transferred to a private ward. He stood dumb wondering who on earth was to pay for it, when she said with her most charming smile:

"I own a bed in perpetuity. It is yours for as long as your man needs it."

Thereupon he made a weak protest, and she doubled both her graciousness and her insistence. It seemed to her that it was necessary to bind the young man to her somehow. He was most sincere when he said at last:

"I can never repay you."

"Oh, yes, you can—you can——" she answered earnestly, "if you will."

He was startled at her vehemence.

"Meanwhile," she went on, "I want to ask you about M. de Guित्रy." She hesitated a moment. "You are his friend and in his confidence?"

"Why I suppose so!"

"Well, then answer me this—has he returned on account of my daughter?"

Olmstead sat looking at her silent because he really didn't know what to say.

"Of course you won't tell me," she went on, "But your very silence is sufficient. Well, I wish he might understand that it's useless; I wish you would convey that to him."

"You mean your daughter doesn't like him?"

"I don't know, I'm not sure. In any event my husband would never consent to anything between them; the Count must leave."

"He did leave," Olmstead threw in lamely.

"A fine man would not seek to marry a woman he can't support! Oh, you needn't answer; you're an American. I know at a glance the sort of man you are, independent, courageous. I know what you think!"

"I wonder——" Olmstead pulled up short and returned to silence.

"I admire you for your loyalty," said Mrs. Dunstan.

"I should have expected just this; you inspired me with confidence the first time I saw you. There are certain men one trusts instinctively."

Olmstead thrilled to her flattery. And this was the woman who had signed Mildred Dunstan to the bit of pink paper lying under his coat! He looked at her curiously. He had expected to see an elderly, hardened, overdressed person, some one at least frivolous and insincere. But this Mrs. Dunstan was in the simplest sort of a gown, with a tiny brooch at her collar, a smile in her eye, a winning note of sympathy in her voice. She was very young looking to have a grown daughter. She had the figure of a girl, and, in spite of her gray hairs, a face unlined and rosy, one of the sweetest faces he had ever seen.

"A man's opinion of a man is so important," she resumed, "the opinion of a man of your sort. If you had a sister, a younger sister, a girl under your protection let's say——"

If he had a sister! His mind seemed to be arrested there. When it caught up again Mrs. Dunstan was saying: "Would you want her to marry Monsieur de Guitry?"

"If she cared for him," he heard himself answer.

"Oh no, no, that wouldn't be your test; that wouldn't be enough for you, not if she were your sister, and you were fond of her! A woman may be carried away, I know that—Oh I do know it!" Mrs. Dunstan paused for a moment before she asked: "Is the Count—well, is he what a man of your sort calls fine?"

Unhesitatingly Olmstead answered: "I believe he is."

"Well, then I am going to ask a great favor of

you. Oh, not as a return for the little I am able to do for you here, but because I realize that with my daughter I am at a disadvantage."

"Her mother?"

"Yes, all mothers are at a disadvantage where their children are concerned, blind as most of us are to it. We belong to different generations, naturally." Her smile was forced now but she went on bravely. "It's the old story of the child in the nursery who can never realize that his parents once played in a nursery too. My daughter doesn't confide in me—but I must know what is happening! You will know before I will. You will be in his confidence, and even possibly in hers——"

"And I'm to betray them?" he exclaimed.

Oh, he felt so proud of himself, standing there while she flashed back at him an unmistakable glance of approval—he able to set his sense of honor against hers!

"I wouldn't ask that of you! But you go about with the Count so much! You will be with him at Mrs. Salgregor's dance tonight probably?"

"Why yes——"

"Well then, you're only to tell me if there's anything that in your opinion I ought to know; I mean—well, if it's inevitable, will you tell me?"

"I will—I'll do what I can," he hesitated, excessively embarrassed.

And their conversation on that subject ended as abruptly as it had begun. Some one came in. Mrs. Dunstan made a few commonplace remarks about the conduct of the hospital, and, presently, he found himself following her through one of the free wards. It was just as he had pictured it: the bandaged, the

sleeping, the moaning, the restless—all tied hard and fast in rules and regulations. As they passed he heard the voice of an invalid calling upon God to bless the lady with him.

So they came to the door of the room to which Hackett had been assigned. The nurse came out and joined Mrs. Dunstan, and he was left to enter alone.

His father lying there with the last rays of the sun coming in through the window, lying there alone in the luxury of privacy! Olmstead leaned over and patted his hand sympathetically. The sick man only groaned.

"Listen," he whispered, "I'll do what I can to get you away from here as soon as possible. Meanwhile you're my valet. When do you think you can get out?"

Hackett raised one eyelid.

"I don't want to distress you, but Mrs. Dunstan—Mildred, is giving you this; it's her room—so you'll want to get out as soon as possible."

Hackett wheezed painfully. Olmstead saw he understood, but that didn't mean he was going to be able to relieve the situation. He was frightfully ill.

"I'll see the Inner Circle tonight and arrange——"

This it was that at last roused the shrunken figure and opened the blue lips. "Devils!" he muttered. "Devils!"

Olmstead leaned closer to catch his words.

"Curse them," he gasped. "I had an attack. They deserted me—left me in the street to die—Curse them!"

"Hush!" said Olmstead as the white-capped nurse glided in with a vase of roses, placing them where the

invalid could see them. Hackett smiled and turned towards them with a sigh of peace.

"From Mrs. Dunstan," said the nurse softly, and Olmstead passed out, leaving his father on the verge of the exit he had longed for.

CHAPTER XII

CALLING herself a fool, Kate Dunstan drove home from the Children's Court. Her philanthropic inclinations were over, and she had the boy on her hands. A fine undertaking! And this man Olmstead had turned from her to become absorbed in a most ordinary looking person in an ill-fitting gray suit, a rather sallow person with a snub nose and a bad figure. To her she seemed lank and awkward—not slender—scrawny. But even the famous Récamier had her defamers! By one of the de Goncourts she was pronounced coarse and homely; by Gavarni she was condemned a little *bourgeoise*, rather too fat and common. And that the woman adored by Chateaubriand, extolled by General Massena and Augustus of Prussia, fêted by Lucien Bonaparte, modeled by Canova! So credit not this estimate of Ethel Blair, vouched for by one whose plans she had frustrated.

Angry tears splashed down on the tulle bow under Kate's chin. Every word that Olmstead had uttered in court seemed to hold a reproach for her. "That man!" she called him. "How dare he?" What a fool she had been to go among those children of the underworld! "Heavens, how I must love him," she muttered under her breath. "Him," referred this time to André de Guity, but when a woman is in tears she may be forgiven for mixing her pronouns.

Her maid Léontine she reproached bitterly. "The

tulle was so shabby that I had to come home!" she cried.

"But Mademoiselle——"

"Look at it!" The argument was invincible, for the tulle was wilted. But Léontine in her ignorance could not see that it was a matter for tears, since Mademoiselle had yards and yards of it laid away, and money enough to buy as much more as she wanted. Like the good servant that she was, however, she forbore to reason and offered camomile tea, tizans, tilleuls, and later—oh, Léontine knew her business—powder and rouge. Finally her mistress yielded to the necessity of composure at least. Then Léontine ventured to remind Mademoiselle that she had accepted for the dance at Mrs. Salgregor's that evening. She was concerned to know which gown Mademoiselle——

She learned that Mademoiselle most emphatically and absolutely was going to wear no gown, for she was not going to the dance. Mademoiselle was going to remain with her headache and her eyes that were nearly starting out of her head with pain, on her couch. She was not going down to dinner and Léontine could, for all she cared, spend the evening where she pleased. Léontine flew to the telephone in the servant's hall.

By the time Mrs. Dunstan appeared to tell the story of her meeting with Mr. Olmstead, she found her daughter apparently calm and self-possessed, so much so that she couldn't resist observing at the end of her recital, "So you met him too!"

"Oh yes," Kate answered with just a shade of self-consciousness. Then the mother remarked that he was a very interesting young man, at which the daughter shrugged indifferently.

"He told me about the boy," announced Mrs. Dunstan.

"Oh yes, to be sure. The boy will be here in the morning," said her daughter, quite as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

"Here?"

"Yes, I wanted to help; we can use him for errands."

"Well, we are making ourselves indispensable," Mrs. Dunstan observed with a smile. "The valet, who is a dying man by the way, is occupying one of my beds in the hospital."

"Mr. Olmstead must be very grateful," said her daughter.

"You'll meet him again this evening, at the dance."

"Is he going?" Kate half rose.

"Yes, with M. de Guity."

Her mother waited and then she said, "I suppose you know he's back?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"He is, Mr. Olmstead tells me, his most intimate friend."

"Intimate? Are they?" Her daughter dwelt upon that.

"He's his sponsor."

"Well, he couldn't have a better one."

The beautiful Katherine's eyes declared war.

"We must have them here," said her mother deliberately capitulating. "Ask them both to dine. We've nothing on for Thursday."

Mademoiselle's electric bell rang in the servant's hall to summon the faithful Léontine. At a glance the well-trained maid knew that the *Chef* of her heart must be kept waiting. Mademoiselle had changed

her mind; Mademoiselle was going to the dance. And then Mademoiselle fell into a brown study. She reconstructed the scene in which she had been pushed into the background. It was quite obvious that she had not impressed the young man sufficiently. She was never made to shine in a whitewashed setting, overrun with dirty children, in simple clothes.

"You may have the black gown," she said to Léontine, "yes, ruff and all; and the hat; it's so quiet it will suit you." At this Léontine became busy reconstructing, too.

Gowns of every other sort were now passed in review. The choice narrowed, wavered, then rested on a white velvet, one long line, falling over a real lace petticoat. And then the hair—all the combs and pins and bandeaux and aigrettes were tried and tried again. Meanwhile Léontine's mistress commented learnedly upon the value of a proper setting.

"You may take the most beautiful woman in the world and put her in the wrong frame, sit her up on a horrid, cheap platform with a background of bare walls and I don't care who she is, she'll be at a disadvantage! In a house like Mrs. Salgregor's, for instance, with its soft lights, its graceful stairway—no woman properly gowned, standing at the head of those stairs, can fail to be effective! A little more powder on the right shoulder, Léontine—and answer the telephone."

It was Alice Belknap. Her voice came over the wire in excited little gasps—something like this:

"You can't imagine the surprise of it—yes, at the opera, in my box, where I must have dropped it—which shows they don't clean very thoroughly. Eh? What? Lucky? I should say so! Mr. Olmstead

said—he dropped in providentially this afternoon—he has such wonderful eyes! I'll never cease to be grateful! I bent down and there it was! Oh, my dear——”

She paid no attention whatever to the sarcastic inflection with which Kate echoed the word——“Found!”

“Presently Mrs. Belknap ended up with: “Now, Kate, do be fair with him—he's a nice boy—don't hurt him——”

Be fair with him! Kate turned away from the telephone, and smiled back at her reflection. Why there wasn't a young man of her acquaintance who wouldn't envy him!

So it came to pass that Olmstead returned from the Salgregor's in a glow of triumph. The fact that the most beautiful girl in the room had sat with him through several dances, stood out as typical of his whole wonderful evening. As a result he began to wonder if possibly he might not be the sort of man whom women liked, were perhaps drawn to, as he had heard was often the case, by some quality he had never realized, and that they divined instinctively. He had never had a chance to test himself in that regard; in fact no woman he had met had ever awakened such desire; but now—today—tonight——

Mrs. Belknap had warned him not to yield to Kate Dunstan's fascinations even before he himself had had a hint that he would have a chance at them. Now one can't, in the same breath, extol the superlative charms of a belle and warn a strange young man to beware of them without assuming that he has some natural attractions of his own. Which seemed to argue that

Mrs. Belknap too was endowed with an instinct for his qualities.

As a matter of conscience she had gone as far as she could in her warning, without actually betraying her friend's confidences. There was something about this young Olmstead that had appealed to her from the first moment, even before he had discovered her necklace. But New York is a busy place, especially the social end of it, and she might have forgotten all about him if he hadn't dropped in to see her at the *matinée*, as the story had come to her even neglecting his opportunity to become acquainted with Kate Dunstan. Her interest in him increased with that, to such a point that she felt almost guilty when she heard that Kate had been at the Children's Court, and taken an interest in the newsboy. After all, it was she who had given her the first chance to play a game in which this inexperienced young man, scarcely older than her brother, was to be victimized.

"Now listen," she had said to him. "All men fall down before Kate Dunstan. She has only to lift her little finger and down they go, and then that's the end of them. Of course she's my dearest friend, and of course you won't take my advice; you'll get your experience in your own way, the way I got mine, by making mistakes."

She had catalogued her marriage quite frankly as among the latter, admitting that, from one point of view, it was a failure. To appreciate the other, one had only to look at her, in her red plush setting in the sacred tier, rejoicing over the return of her emeralds.

Later, wedged in among a crowd of black coats and bare shoulders, gorgeous fabrics and gleaming jewels, in a corner of the most sumptuous private hall

in New York, big enough to admit of four great columns and a double stairway, Mrs. Belknap had again appropriated young Olmstead. While he stood beside her, slowly recovering from his first thrill at the beauty and splendor of the scene, she gave him a sort of review of its ingredients, intimating, with equal flattery to them both, that when she had finished he could sift them to suit himself. She punctuated her remarks with introductions right and left, and while he was busy shaking hands and exchanging banalities with the loveliest women he had ever seen, he heard her endowing him, confidentially and intimately, as splendidly as her ready imagination suggested.

All this was very amusing, and for a time he gave himself over to the enjoyment of it completely, but presently it wasn't half as important as the key to the scene itself. It might be expedient at any minute for him to disappear, and it seemed to him he had never seen so complicated a house. He tried to guess where the door on his right led. There must be stairs beyond—service stairs; yet the living rooms were on the other side of the ball-room which was an annex. Nothing declared itself! It reminded him of a poor sort of detective story where, suddenly, one finds that someone, never suggested or mentioned, is the guilty person.

To explain his uneasy glances he expressed to Mrs. Belknap his admiration of some tapestries, whereupon she assured him that his host and hostess were chiefly remarkable for the brilliant purple velvet carpet on their steps.

"If they had selected red, they'd be like a hundred other billionaires. On that carpet Mamie Salgregor

will hold attention through this season anyway. There's Kate—" she broke off suddenly.

The noble stairway was completely deserted when Kate Dunstan appeared alone at the head of it. For a second, under a brilliant light, her hand resting on the purple cushioned balustrade, in her white gown, with her gray-gold hair, against a white background, she reminded one of Whistler's famous girl. Then gradually the purple carpet rose behind her. She descended with her little head held high, her eyes straight ahead of her while, with the unerring instinct of a woman in love, without appearing to cast so much as a glance in his direction, she picked out André de Guitry and knew that he had seen her. A sea of black coats surrounded her. His was not among them. Well, then the game was on!

"Oh Lord, she's looking at you!" Mrs. Belknap exclaimed.

Olmstead remembered that later, and he smiled to think he had asked: "Who?"

At that moment it happened that the gay, jewel-laden throng about him was thickest, and that he had found his opportunity. It had required all his skill and all his wits. He couldn't afford to have his attention deflected for a second. All his work at the opera had been, as we know, for nothing. He didn't regret that, for he had gained, in attaching Mrs. Belknap, far more than he had lost.

And then he heard her say with a delighted chuckle, "You'll do! Any man who can be indifferent to that vision can take care of himself."

Yes, his whole day had been incredible from the moment he had taken the centre of the stage in the court room, to the moment he had decided to approach

Kate Dunstan. He had waited till late in the evening. Upon any other man she'd have inflicted punishment by turning away haughtily, but upon him she smiled divinely, murmuring, "I began to wonder how long you were going to ignore me." She looked him frankly in the eyes and added, boldly, "I hope it's a pose."

"A wretched pose," he had sense to answer her, "and one, you see, I couldn't live up to."

They were both laughing when she said: "Well, if you corner me I should say it was overdone. Now, mine?"

"Yours?"

She nodded at him. "I know; Alice Belknap told me."

So she really doesn't want us to be friends, he decided learnedly, having read about the ways of women in the books of men. But this one had missed fire, he concluded triumphantly, for, in the next few minutes, Kate Dunstan gave him every sort of opportunity to reject all he had said before he knew her. In the course of this he was obliged to listen to much that was, in the circumstances, rather irritating to him. He learned that she was tremendously proud of her father and his position; very tender in her regard for her mother, who, he was assured, was quite the best woman he could imagine and the least worldly. Oh, what she had done for his man in the hospital was just the sort of thing she loved to do! When he knew her better he'd see; besides she had taken a fancy to him.

Presently he found himself with Miss Dunstan, at the end of the ball-room, in an alcove, dimly lit, where the music reached them less strenuously, but from

where they could still see the dancing, heated, brilliant throng beyond.

She stood against a bank of growing roses with her eyes upon André de Guitry, to all appearances intensely amused by some débutante. It struck her that she had made no such headway as she had planned. She turned back to Olmstead, and struck out boldly, taking a short cut on the well-worn path of flattery.

"Yes, you are different," she said, with her soul in her eyes.

He grew conscious under the glory of them, and something in him, perhaps it was his vanity, seemed to respond at last. His eyes were riveted with a look that sent a flush of triumph to her cheeks. He seemed, for the first time, to be really seeing her as she was accustomed to be seen. She could never have looked more lovely than now as she played carelessly with her rope of pearls, twisting and turning them so that the clasp, set with a diamond of tremendous size, flashed into his eyes. Under the ardor of them she felt her neck flush.

"I wear these pearls," she told him with her rare tinkling laugh, "so constantly that the jewelers say I am destroying their value, eating them up. But I love them so! They're all my own, something of importance that really belongs to me. I may need them some day!"

Then she slipped easily into a sort of intimate confession of her feelings that was most flattering. She spoke of friends of hers who had been rich one day and poor the next. She told him how terror stricken she had been after burglars had entered their country house, and taken a lot of their gold service.

"But we still have hopes of recovering some of it,"

she exclaimed. "Only today we have had encouraging news of a possible clue."

These words brought Olmstead to himself, back to his own feeling of rebellion and rage at this world of his enemies.

"Congratulations," he said blandly. "Yet the poor devil who took them probably belongs to the masses you pity so! 'And I understand,'" he went on with cool impertinence, "that you have already duplicated your loss."

"But the new dishes are not to be compared with those that were stolen!" she cried indignantly.

"Ah, that makes a difference." He sat looking at her with a scornful smile, hoping she had caught the full intent of his irony. He even congratulated himself upon his boldness, remembering that he had been urged to be himself always; well then, he could at least have the satisfaction of saying what he thought.

The next moment Kate Dunstan bowled him over without actually intending it, in fact without ever knowing how she had done it. Irritated with herself and with him, she had lowered her eyes trying to detach the clasp of her pearls where it had caught in the lace of her gown. She struggled with it. "Can you?" she said, looking up.

She caught again the intensity of his gaze. He leaned towards her quickly and, as he touched the eighty thousand dollar string that was to be his goal, the culmination of his ambition, he felt a thrill pass through him. Miss Dunstan stared at him, amazed. His emotion had registered. Hastily he drew back his too eager hand. Visibly disturbed he glanced out into the ball-room, and realized that at this moment

he must cover up such agitation with an excuse that would carry.

"I prefer not! I, pardon me, but I never like the responsibility of holding anything so valuable," he began. But no, that wouldn't do, not for a millionaire——

"Besides it belongs to you," he blurted out, and then waited uneasily, anxiously.

She murmured a few deprecating words, quite as though she hadn't put forth all her efforts to bring him to just such a pass.

"Ah, our friend, Guitry, hasn't told you?" he asked with fine surprise.

"Told me? What?"

"That it was you who lured me on into the sacred Four Hundred?"

"I?"

"Yes, I saw you twice, once in the street and once——oh, you must know I'm a barbarian!"

He was apparently so ardent, so sincere that she felt sorry for him.

"I know you're nice and candid," she said with great frankness. "I'm glad André de Guitry has you for a friend. Tell him I said so! I wish I knew more men like you."

"Oh, please——" He had really made more of an impression than he had intended.

"Which of our men would have taken the time, even if he had had the thought, to go down to the court in behalf of a small newsboy?" She went on to tell him that he could rely upon her to take care of Jimmy. "You and I are going to be great friends. You will let me know you better——"

His attentive ear had caught, meanwhile, a con-

fusion of exclamations. Once again he cast a sudden searching glance into the ball-room, and, almost instantly, he clasped his hand to his waistcoat with a startled cry.

"I've lost my watch," he exclaimed, "one I've had for years—and my seal, the one with a carbuncle in its head!"

Olmstead quickly led the way back into the ball-room, and immediately a crowd of excited people bore down upon them. Their spokesman was a pretty blonde who cried out in much agitation: "Oh Kate, have you heard?"

"Mr. Olmstead has lost his watch!" exclaimed Kate Dunstan instantly.

"And I've lost my pin," cried the other. "Oh, Mr. Olmstead, I was just looking for you, to ask if you saw it on me when you stood near me in the doorway——"

Every word came back to Olmstead now in his own room. Oh, how well he had borne himself under a sea of questions! It was he who had asked them in rapid fire as he stood feeling his pockets.

The lady's pin was of diamonds with an emerald in the centre. If they could only trace it, it would perhaps be a clue to his seal! The watch was not extraordinary at all, he had assured them of that, but the carbuncle set in the top of his seal, of a rare flame color— 'Ah, that was quite another matter!

He smiled to think he had even found some woman, Mrs. Belknap had told him she was a sort of hanger on, who, when he appealed to her in a rather intimate way, had declared she had noticed the seal hanging from his waistcoat.

'All this had led up perfectly to just what he wanted,

a tour of that splendid house from the ball-room to the dressing rooms. Some twenty or thirty of the guests formed themselves into a searching party, and started off through a hall that was a gallery, lined with paintings by great masters, through a room filled with cabinets devoted to miniatures; through another, given over to a collection of jeweled snuff boxes—a house full of treasures.

Kate Dunstan, leading the way with Olmstead beside her and Guitry following, assumed, throughout the search, the air of a guide.

"Here, behold the most celebrated Rembrandt in America! To the right, up those steps, are the distinguished bed-rooms of the distinguished family. Among them the gorgeous boudoir of Madame! The panels there are famous! They were brought from a Doge's palace! The tapestries belonged to Marie Antoinette, guaranteed genuine—cost countless thousands!"

And Olmstead had shown an interest and enthusiasm as great as her own. These two were unquestionably the life of the party. More and more they seemed to agree, more and more friendly they became. Presently they were arm in arm, even, for a moment, hand in hand! By her attentions this famous belle had settled Olmstead's position. For an Australian millionaire she had ignored an old and honored title. So the others construed the situation.

By a little strategy, by a little manoeuvring, by the use of his brains and his personality, he had succeeded—actually he, a servant of the Justifiables! From his flight heavenward he came to earth, cursing them as his father had.

Some one was knocking at the door. He was

rather pleased to see Guitry enter, particularly as he began at once to congratulate him upon his success.

"You are launched," he said. "The most beautiful woman in New York has become your sponsor!" But he said it without joy.

"We got on famously!" Olmstead smiled again at the recollection of it. "And you assisted," he went on easily, "simply by withholding the apple. The inevitable result was that Miss Dunstan straightway began to cry for it, and I being the apple—behold!"

"She reproached me for not having introduced you before. She told me you were delightful, handsome, magnetic, unusual."

Guitry walked the length of the room and turned to add:

"She asked me how long I had known you, where I had met you."

Olmstead's repose was perfect as he sank into the most comfortable chair in the room. "And you answered?" he asked pleasantly.

"Ah, what could I answer but lies—lies? What do I know about you?"

"Well, what do you want to know?"

"I? Nothing; I said you were my friend."

Olmstead remained silent.

"You have been my friend whatever happens," Guitry resumed.

Olmstead had been gracious up to that moment, now it was almost foolish the way he protested.

"We are not friends. Ours was a business arrangement purely. You consented to introduce into society a man of whom you knew nothing, for a certain sum and expenses paid."

"At least I have vouched for you," Guitry answered

as he went towards the door. Then he turned and said gently: "I beg your pardon, you have done nothing; it is not your fault—you are right. There is no reason why you should be a friend of mine, it is only upon me that the obligation of friendship rests. You have been more than kind. It is to you I owe my life. You have been generous, most generous."

He came back into the room. It was quite evident that he had something more to say. He sat down to it.

"This week, while you have been climbing the social ladder, I have seen that you did not need me. I have seen that you could have succeeded as well without me. You have only to appear, and the tables are turned. I am the friend of an attractive millionaire! I do not resent it, but I realize that I am no longer necessary to you."

Guitry leaned forward, and with great emphasis added: "I never was necessary to you."

Olmstead looked at him, genuinely astonished.

"This you know yourself," Guitry resumed. "You sought me after I left you so abruptly, frightened at what you called the gnats, I now believe, in order that you might rescue me! I have come to know the sort of man you are! You are splendid! I know what you did for the ragged, little newsboy; your kindness to the unknown reporters of the papers; your man, whom you kept even when he was too ill to serve you, and whom you are still keeping in a hospital. You are generous, fine. I was never necessary to you—never!"

"Oh, if that's all that is troubling you," Olmstead began.

"Not all. I had two reasons in returning to society. I felt I must see again the woman I loved. I had

done her a great wrong to let her love me; I thought we had perhaps idealized each other—" He paused; then, as Olmstead still sat silent, he resumed with effort, "I found her cured, and now I realize I am not strong enough to stand by and see another win the one that in all my life I have loved the most."

"Nonsense! You go too far!"

But Guitry went still further! "Ah, you confided to me your object in entering society. You were frank with me. You have also confided that object to Miss Dunstan; I had it from her lips. She told me with joy that your object in entering the great world was to meet her! I can see the future for you both."

The future! Olmstead sat silent as it rose before his eyes.

"It is my intention to return to Besançon, where in childhood I lived, with the last money you will pay me. I will rent a room from my father's friend and teach there English. No one ever comes to that little town. I shall hide myself there until I am cured."

"And the heiress you were going to win?" asked Olmstead quizzically.

"It is too soon. Some day perhaps I may feel able to sell again my title for what it will bring, but not now; I am not yet strong enough. If I stay here I shall return your kindness with ingratitude. In my heart I shall wish you to fail. I must go soon, as soon as possible. There, I have told you all. I repeat, you have a big, generous nature. I am not so sure of myself."

Alone once more, Olmstead indulged in a reverie of impossible imaginings, wherein he and Guitry would escape unscathed. The Dunstan house would be

robbed; he couldn't help that. Then he dreamed that the Inner Circle would scatter; as far as he was concerned—forever. But first Guitry, retaining his belief in him, would leave for his everlasting Besançon. In that little town no gossip or scandal would reach him. Rid of him, Olmstead would disappear too—slowly, gradually; he would take his time. Then, if he really had captivated Kate Dunstan—well the advantages were obvious. Her name linked with his! After that her parents would have to see him through; it would mean that at least. The future rose in glowing colors, as he thought of the heiress whom Guitry loved.

Finally he went to sleep and dreamed—oh such a ridiculous, impossible dream!—a dream that seemed to have nothing to do with his thoughts. A girl, with gray eyes that shone and shone like the eyes of a soft, gray cat, was serving him with tea out of a greenish cup that became suddenly the color of her eyes. And just as he took it, he saw it was chipped. He let it fall, and as it broke, he awoke——

Foolish to dream of Miss Blair!

CHAPTER XIII

IN A small dingy room, devoid of dignity, surrounded by cheap, whitewashed walls, bare of frames or quotations, in the rear of a small shop with which Storch had some mysterious connection, the Inner Circle had been summoned in the early morning on urgent business. They were expecting Olmstead.

Scattered over a table in the middle of the room were the daily papers. Pierce, the respectable Judge; Bolan, red of face; Cryder, vulgar of speech, were talking of Hackett as they rustled them back and forth. From isolated sentences, expurgated of the usual slang of their craft and their crowd, what had happened was quite clear. He had been in the street with two of them when he had had a seizure. With the gathering of a crowd and the summoning of a policeman, they had deserted him.

The Inner Circle listened with approval. They were in high good humor for, shortly before his accident, Hackett had given them most encouraging information of the venture in which they were all interested. They had lost their leader but never had they been more firmly his disciples, never had their determination to fly his banner been stronger, never had they sought more earnestly to show respect for his amazing list of precedents. In view of the deal

upon which they were engaged, and which was increasing in magnitude, day by day, every one of these men appreciated, at last, the importance of impressing Olmstead with their sincerity. They believed their hold on him would be best maintained by upholding the principles of the organization. The object of this meeting was largely for that purpose.

While waiting for Olmstead they had appointed a chairman, Storch himself, since the room had been secured by him. He was even supplied with a gavel which lay, for the moment, beside the inevitable cigar box. One of the most enterprising of them had tacked up several clippings with glaring head lines.

Pierce, with his nose buried in one of the papers, suddenly gave an exclamation.

Hackett was in the minds of all, but Pierce had come upon news more interesting. Amid expressive chuckles and oaths, he read out with some enthusiasm, much amazement, and not over-elegant diction, "The very latest story they tell about Mr. John Burr Olmstead is that he was taken by a woman, more famous for her wealth than her taste, to the establishment of 'Colette', known in high society as Lady Bruce Porter, the caterer of fashion to the fashionables.

"Once, perhaps unwittingly, certainly before she knew who he was, Lady Bruce Porter had snubbed the Australian. He had his chance to revenge himself when, in her establishment, he stood listening, with apparent interest, while his companion discussed laces and trimmings. Meanwhile living models paraded before them. Suddenly the Australian saw coming towards him an exquisite gown of violet velours. 'Take that one,' he said to his companion while the gown approached nearer and nearer. 'Too bad it's

on such a poor model, surprising she ever got a job among all these beauties. Then he paused, for the person in the violet velours had heard him. She bowed stiffly when his companion finally succeeded in presenting Lady Bruce Porter, the famous Colette, wearing what in shopkeeper's language is known as 'the lady's own'."

The Judge looked over his spectacles, the others grunted, grinned, swore. The chairman rapped showing he held office to some purpose.

"We must have results," he said solemnly. If it was any achievement to be quoted in the columns of a newspaper he intended to ignore it. "This investment has cost money. The——" he hesitated to find the proper word and then observed with unction, "the plant was established by us. We must now get action."

At this point Duflon entered with an importance of manner that plainly indicated he had something to say. His goatee was waxed to its finest point, his shirt front was elaborately tucked, he wore an enormously high collar and a very long-waisted coat. Under his arm he carried the slouchiest of slouch hats.

He was eager to report on his visit to the opera which he had made in the interest of the Inner Circle. He was enthusiastic about what he had seen there. What he had heard was not of the slightest interest to any of them.

"I sit high in the heavens, but where I can see well the boxes of the grand tier. I have learn who sit in each one of the box—Madame Astor; Madame Belmont; Madame Belknap." He repeated the names with genuine relish. "Olmstead he is there; such a pretty business he do! He flit, like a butterfly, and pause presently at the box of Madame Belknap. My

countryman, de Guitry, he is the cicerone! I glue to my eyes my glasses——” Duflon dropped his ribboned monocle to illustrate with his slender hands his various manoeuvres. “I see on the neck of Mrs. Belknap her famous emerald necklace, and close to it our young member is sitting!”

Olmstead had come through the little shop, and now stood in the doorway. For a few minutes the meeting, disregarding the subject at hand, resolved itself into an ovation.

One of the men held up a newspaper. “I’ll blow my head off if you ain’t in the society columns,” cried Cryder.

“Let us remember the source from which they collect their items and remain modest,” observed Olmstead drily.

But Cryder’s enthusiasm was genuine.

“I’m darned if they don’t call you a wit!” he cried.

“But first they recognize my millions,” laughed Olmstead. “My companion murmured the word millionaire in all faith and honesty, and society took up the murmur. The Count and his prize monkey! On his introduction, with their noses to the ground, they vouch for me. This poor Guitry!”

Olmstead looked from one to the other for sympathy. The expression “frozen face” was much in use among them. He met it now on all sides.

“This woman, Collette?” said the chairman, taking in his flabby, freckled hand the newspaper which the judge had dropped.

“Good story, eh?” observed Olmstead, smiling.

“Is her place worth a visit?”

“I haven’t been there.”

"It ain't true?" exclaimed the chairman quite off his guard.

Olmstead smiled indulgently as he recalled the girl in gray who had told him she would hand the paragraph to the "Man about Town" for his column.

"We may now return," observed the chairman presently, "to facts. When Monsieur Duflon paused he left our representative within touch of the celebrated emerald necklace of Mrs. Belknap."

In that second Olmstead knew just what had happened. He must expect to be spied upon at every turn now, from now to the end. They trusted him no more than they had trusted Hackett, no more than they would trust one another.

He crossed the room slowly and stood looking at Duflon, who resumed with enthusiasm:

"I see Madame take off that necklace which we have so admired from the distance!"

Olmstead kept his temper and stood listening.

"In case of danger I hope you would have been within calling distance," he ventured at last.

"While I look," continued Duflon, "the lady she take it off and lay it, I may say, in his hands!"

The men were now gazing at Olmstead eagerly, greedily, suspiciously. But he let them gaze while his own eyes searched the room with simulated eagerness, even anxiety, as if, for the first time, he missed some one important to the meeting. He asked for Hackett, with every semblance of innocence as to his whereabouts. He told how he had waited for him, his Man of Affairs, and how necessary he had become to him.

His enquiries were met with indifference. No one appeared to know or care what had become of Hackett. He had been ill, that they vouchsafed, nothing more;

they had heard nothing. His disappearance was the reason of this meeting. The Inner Circle was there to receive all "investments."

The chairman rapped importantly.

"We may now return," he said at last, "to the question in hand. Monsieur Duflon has the floor."

"The necklace was thick like this!" Duflon with excited gesture held out four of his slender fingers to measure out the width.

Olmstead nodded and observed calmly: "Yes the necklace is worth while."

"It is," affirmed Duflon in ecstasy.

"And I resisted its temptation," Olmstead looked him in the eyes.

"But I have saw it in your hand!" cried Duflon, much excited.

"Well you might have seen it on the lady's neck, if you had been where I was last night!" Olmstead thundered back at him.

"You missed it then?" The chairman delivered his words with contemptuous inflection.

"Assuredly," said Olmstead firmly.

"Bah!" the chairman spat with emphasis. "We must have that necklace!"

"And end my campaign!" cried Olmstead.

"She is one of our safest clients! Her name is on our books!"

"Then blot it out!" Olmstead glared at the chairman. "Or we may handle her stock once too often!"

"Do I understand that our representative is ready to close out?" asked the chairman, with all the sarcasm he could command.

"If you wish," Olmstead shrugged indifferently, at the same time producing his note book. "My engage-

ments!" he announced distinctly. "I am engaged to dine with Mrs. Arpad Dunstan this week, informally. Last night I danced at the house of Mrs. Salegregor. By the end of this week, through their front doors, I shall have entered the houses of half a dozen millionaires! Shall I keep on in my own way? Gentlemen it is for you to say."

The men filled the room with ominous protestations and jeers.

"Now, don't get cold feet." Olmstead cried, suddenly dropping into the vernacular.

On the table before them he flung a pin, all diamonds, with an emerald in the center, and sat watching them as they pounced upon it.

This the Association he was bound to! The leadership of these men his heritage! With visions of lovely women in his eyes, their voices in his ears, he sat looking his companions over, while, under the eager fingers of the Judge, the diamonds fell gleaming from their setting.

These the picked men of his profession! And if this deal were successful he would be their leader. That the end and aim of his ambition! But, meanwhile, there was something else. Why had he been to all this trouble if he didn't mean to protect Mrs. Belknap and her young brother to the end?

He sprang to his feet demanding attention.

"Listen to me," he cried in a determined voice. "I declare further investment in the Belknap stock unsafe. Hands off for all of us! The time has come when, if I'm going to have all the risk, I'm going to have my own way—do I get it?"

"These diamonds are the real thing," hissed Storch.

"But the necklace was in five rows of emeralds!" protested Duffon.

"Do I get it?" repeated Olmstead.

"What do you want?" asked the chairman reluctantly.

"The name of Belknap off our books!"

"Oh if that's all——"

"Do I get it?" Olmstead repeated, pronouncing every letter of the four words.

"Motion——" whispered the Judge, "Motion——"

"Gentlemen the motion is before you," the chairman ejaculated with asperity.

"One minute," cried Olmstead, detaining them with a gesture. "Mrs. Belknap has vouched for me! The Count de Guitry murmured the word 'millionaire' in her ear and she made it her own. Can we afford to arouse suspicion in such a woman?"

With the diamonds shining in their eyes, it was evident that the Inner Circle was inclining to his views.

"On her word," he went on, "my wealth has become prodigious. I understand," he added smiling, "that there are those who have seen people who have visited my mines. I expect any day to meet some one who has been entertained at my mansion in the skies! Gentlemen, on the strength of the reputation I am establishing I shall soon sail for Europe, my cabin filled with flowers. I shall carry with me regrets and anything else I may have annexed—a millionaire beyond suspicion! But if this is to be accomplished I must have my own way. We must not invest in any Belknap stock."

Silence followed on this.

"Gentlemen, the motion is before you," the chairman announced at last.

It was unanimously carried, if a trifle sullenly in a couple of instances.

"Better get those diamonds into your toupee, Dufflon," Olmstead observed in his most business like tone.

Then he turned to say: "Now something else! I want to remind you all that certain things were agreed upon at the beginning of this deal. I was not to be jeopardized by the awkwardness of someone too zealous. Be careful; don't follow me too closely. My next report will include the Dunstan home; I shall keep quiet for a few days. When I can I will communicate with you."

The meeting was presently over, and with a nod he strode out alone.

CHAPTER XIV

THE experiences of the next few days brought to Olmstead a recognition of qualities that he had never known he possessed. They seemed to crop up as he found himself more and more accepted, trusted, flattered. For a time it was delightful and then gradually irritating, for with the trust he had become, of all things in the world, sensitive. Was this sensitiveness a new development? It took him back to his childhood, to moments when he remembered distinctly having the same uncomfortable feeling. Then gradually, with rubbing up against the world, with hard schooling, he had lost it. Now, for some reason, it had cropped up again. He felt himself freezing between two fires—the glow of success and the warmth of hospitality. He couldn't stretch out to grasp one without accepting the other. Damnable predicament that he must have known all along! What did social success mean but hospitality? Fifty times he called himself a fool, but that didn't help matters, he went on freezing, cold as ice to all well meant approaches. With this result, the greatness he had set out to achieve was now thrust upon him. Fine words to use in a world that gave birth to the lady who regretted that she had made a mistake and read "Hamlet," when preparing herself to attend a famous lecture on "Bacon, the Author of the Merchant of Venice."

born young woman, apparently so absolutely frank in her liking for him, yet so genuine and kind. He regretted it, but in the circumstances he felt he must encourage her, lead her on, so that, if it became necessary, he might turn their friendship to account. This would enable him to hold back her mother's check, at least, perhaps, until he was no longer a recipient of her favors. It had been impossible to remove Hackett from the reach of Mrs. Dunstan's kindnesses; he was a dying man lying most of the time unconscious. Just what he would do as things developed, or how he would do it, Olmstead had still to decide; but the fact that he was in the good graces of Kate Dunstan would tide him over many difficulties that might arise while the Justifiable were conducting operations. Her friendship was a sort of safe conduct. He would continue, for the present, to shine in the light of it, and then, following Guitry, make his farewells and disappear. He hoped his disappearance wouldn't affect her too much; he rather thought it wouldn't considering how quickly she had recovered from Guitry's apparent defection. Still of course Guitry—well perhaps she had never really cared for him.

Meanwhile the invitation to dine. Guitry had refused haughtily, and Olmstead was left timidly contemplating the word "informal." He wasn't sure just how to take it. He needed advice, and he went to the woman among all others in New York who insisted upon remaining his friend, no matter what he said or did. He found her in what was apparently her most frivolous mood, in a mood that seemed to fit her gown, her cigarette, her whiskey and soda. She received him in a marble alcove, a sort of bay widening out of the upper hall, on a red velvet divan be-

hind a table, curved and gilded, that made no pretence of being built for tea. In porphery basins on either side of her, wide open roses floated, a glory of deep red. The acme of extravagance, sometimes called "*Le dernier cri*," was reached in her diaphanous gown of pink that appeared to be so frail as to warrant the prediction that it would never be worn again.

"Where's Kate?" she asked suddenly.

He tried, like a well-bred person, to feign unconsciousness of any implied meaning.

"Is she expected?"

"If she had known you were coming!" She laughed nervously, irrelevantly it seemed to Olmstead, and then, after he had explained, she said in a clear high voice, "Informal! I suppose you think she means it."

"Well, why not?"

"Oh, it's a phrase, and the poor innocent who lets himself be deceived by it into thinking he's going into the family circle gets sadly left. Dress-coat or dinner jacket? We've all been there," she cried in the slang of her day. "For a woman it's worse, particularly if she happens to be poor and doesn't want to be seen in the same gown too often. Informal! I once thought it meant to come just in the simple little gown you are accustomed to wear at home. I did it, and found all the rest in ball costume. That was in the day when I never accepted invitations till the sales were over. Oh, I used to miss so many things worth while—nothing to wear till after the Horse Show when the reductions began."

She rattled on for a few moments, and then returned to the subject at hand.

"I wonder how many you'll be tonight. She must have another woman at least; you and Guitry——"

"Guitry has refused."

"Why, that's absurd!" Mrs. Belknap seemed much irritated.

"He has something else on."

"Nonsense, that's not the reason! If I were you I wouldn't go," she said with great decision.

"Oh, I've promised."

"Ridiculous," she muttered again. "You know what you think of Kate Dunstan. You know you don't admire her, surely you don't; you can't; you know what you said of her in the beginning."

It was quite evident she didn't want him to change his mind, which seemed to him rather treacherous on the part of one who was always declaring herself—"Kate's dearest friend."

Mrs. Belknap banished her smiles and sat frowning at him. "So you do admire her?" She insisted upon an answer.

"Doesn't every one! I mean don't all men?"

"I wish you knew women better," she sighed. "Informal? If Kate Dunstan really means it—if she and her mother are going to receive you informally, in the bosom of the family—then beware! Well, wear your dress-coat anyway. You're never safe at a dinner in New York without it; and perhaps I'll meet you there."

But she avoided that, and, instead, she had a serious half-hour with Kate, which he didn't know till later. Meanwhile he was just as obtuse as any one who judges by externals; he thought Mrs. Belknap rather heartless and disloyal, then he said to himself some-

thing about women never being true to one another; he had seen that often enough in print to believe it.

To Olmstead alone, a small chap with two rows of shiny new buttons, opened the door of the Dunstan house. He greeted the gentleman with a familiar grin, and then breathlessly thanked him for everything that had come to him, his food, his coat, his life, his freedom! He relieved him of his hat with an effusiveness that said he was his abject slave. Of course you know he didn't use any of these expressions, but Olmstead was just as uncomfortably conscious of his own undeservedness. If he had expressed his feelings at that moment he would have given an exhibition of ill temper positively childish. Instead he followed, meekly enough, the small buttons who turned him over to a pompous butler who ushered him past the more formal reception rooms into the library, imposing perhaps to a man but little used to luxury of any kind, but for so great a house, comfortable and homelike. A fire burned on the hearth, flowers were in the vases, and two hearty young boys greeted him.

"Funny thing," said one of them, "we're always the first!"

"I guess that's because we're always hungry!" cried the other.

"Mother says you're from Australia. A long way off isn't it?"

Suddenly in the presence of those two fresh faced, clear skinned, clear eyed boys, Olmstead lost his tongue.

He said "yes" and "no," much as though he had changed places with them.

They rattled on about Mother and Granny and Sis,

and told the guest they were home for a holiday. Other fellows went places but, gee, their home was all right, and had he seen the new dog—and mother was a brick because she had found him——

Then the boys were brushed aside and there stood the mother herself, smiling her welcome upon him, so frankly glad to see him. She drew him apart and made him sit on the sofa beside her, while she talked of their patient—she always referred to Hackett as “our patient”—he was a bond between them. On the morrow it would be again her day at the hospital. She would see him herself.

They were joined now by Kate, tall, slender, pale, with neck and shoulders bare, except for the string of pearls that she had made invariable.

“We were afraid you’d be engaged and not care for a family party,” she observed in welcome.

“And a family party with the head of the house absent! I do so want you and my husband to meet, he will be here any day now.”

Olmstead noted that fact especially as he sat between the wife and daughter of Arpad Dunstan, when, suddenly, he started as though he had received a shock. Why the devil hadn’t Guitry told him there was a grandmother in the house—an old lady in silver gray brocade and silver gray hair! He was always uncomfortable with children and old people; the former saw too little and the latter too much, or was it the other way?

He stood now with the three generations, so proud of one another, and all of them viewing him with apparent approval. Kate seemed perhaps a trifle pale and aloof, with a shade of embarrassment in her manner, but still she smiled and gripped his hand even more

heartily than usual. The mother looked at him with her kind, confiding eyes, the grandmother smiled upon him, the boys showed their admiration; with Mrs. Belknap's unmistakable warning ringing in his ears he, the welcome guest among them, was presently leading the honored grandmother into the quiet, substantial, homelike dining room. Good Lord how he had succeeded!

"You look so serious," one of them said to him. And then he came to himself and helped to keep the the ball rolling. It glanced from Australia and the mines, to some one's last book, to social happenings, great and small, to his views and opinions. There was a good deal that was personal about their talk, as though they wanted to show him how intimately they had taken him into their circle. He was accorded every chance to shine. They laughed at his jokes, and listened to his stories. Mrs. Dunstan couldn't have been more gracious, or Kate more solicitous. He tried to lend himself to the pleasure of it gratefully. Why shouldn't he be grateful? And over such a good dinner! After all he was human! Was he? He had never wondered about it before, but then he had never had a chance at the hospitality of such people before.

After dinner he found himself, as though by accident, alone in the conservatory with Kate Dunstan, listening with only half an ear to what she was saying. He had in his mind a great scene with at least three characters, whom he had to get in and out as deftly as a dramatist who is master of his trade. Cryder was small; that window over there would lend itself to entrance; but the point of departure—that was more difficult. He stood before the glass doors that opened into the hallway where the others still lingered.

He noted another exit that led to the butler's pantry, and then, presently, he discovered that his being alone with Miss Dunstan was not an accident.

It was, in fact, a moment that had been hanging over Kate's head ever since Alice Belknap, very diplomatically exaggerating her charms, but nevertheless in a stormy interview, had insisted that she should open the eyes of him whom she called her latest victim. Victim! The word irritated primarily because she wasn't at all sure that she had gained her object. It certainly wasn't to have this young man on her hands with serious intentions at this stage of the game. Oh, why on earth couldn't he be amused instead of succumbing with her very first onslaught? Men we so silly!

Kate's voice recalled him just as he had decided that he must see the rest of the house.

"I hope you're not a man easily annoyed by gossip," she said. He caught a new anxious note in her voice and answered with a smile, embarrassed as to how to keep matters between them from culminating until——

"I am so sorry M. de Guित्रy couldn't come with you," she said sitting forward resolutely.

"He sent his regrets by me."

"I see so little of him nowadays. I wonder if he knows I'm very fond of him."

"No, I don't think he does." A long pause. She decided Olmstead was stupid after all.

"Has he ever told you that he——" she hesitated for the right word—"that we were the best of friends once?"

"Oh yes," Olmstead answered drily, marking specially the use of the word "once," with a nasty

feeling of superiority. It wasn't loyal of him, but then why should he expect to be loyal?

Meanwhile Kate prepared for a scene, for it seemed to her the young man certainly wasn't himself; a scene during which she would have to do the usual thing; tell him how fond she was of him as a friend, and then——

The stiff butler handing a ring of cups was a relief. They were green and none of them chipped. Involuntarily Olmstead thought of Miss Blair, and her home with the sunshine and the birds. It was two days since he had seen her—two days since——

Kate never took coffee at night, but she took it now, just for something to hold in her hand, something to toy with in her uneasiness. She glanced up from it to find the young man staring at her over his cup. She returned his look with one filled with gentle sympathy. Her task wasn't a pleasant one and she longed to have it over.

"You must tell M. de Guित्रy that I hope to see him soon."

Then he answered something that drew the soul out of her. "He's busy getting ready to sail."

Kate Dunstan's hand trembled so that she set her cup down. "Sailing? When?"

"Oh, any day," he answered carelessly.

Kate had grown white to the lips. She didn't care what happened now, whose feelings she seared or saved—she must see him!

"Why is he going?" she managed to gasp.

"Business; one thing or another!"

"I hope he's not going because—I hope I haven't hurt him?"

"You? How?"

"I've seen so little of him," she blurted out. "Has he noticed that you and I—does he care?" She must know—dignity to the winds! But the young man staring at her still didn't seem to take in what she meant. No wonder she thought him stupid!

"It wasn't fair for me to use you," she confessed at last.

And then the light broke slowly. What a joke! That struck him first.

"I'm so sorry if I've hurt you, if I've made you care. You're right to be indignant!"

Indignant! He of all men! Really it was not until he heard her apologizing that he realized how badly he had been treated. Then, out of the feelings that surged through him, one finally triumphed. He had positively a moment of exultation to think that this lovely, high-bred, well-born creature, so exquisite in her purity, guarded, shielded, surrounded by care and love, this lady should be asking forgiveness of him, Jack Olmstead of the Justifiabes.

In broken sentences she acknowledged she had wronged him cruelly, deceived him, played with him.

So she had! She might have broken his heart, this girl who had seemed to him so upright, so kind, so innocent of any tricks or wiles.

"M. de Guity was so indifferent that I——"

He recovered to finish her sentence. "That you were making a fool of me for your own purposes, that nothing mattered so long as you bagged your game!" It seemed as though only in stating it so brutally could he get the real meaning of it.

"I love him!" Her defence at last.

At that he broke into a half triumphant, half mocking laugh.

"The great lady, born and bred in luxury, wants a Count!"

She gave a little moan of protest.

"The varieties of sin are so numerous, so humorous," he observed reflectively.

She caught the words. "Oh if you want me to say we're a poor lot, we women—well, we are!"

"Yes, that's what I do want! I need it!"

Of course she didn't understand him, and no better when he said with some excitement: "And yet you pull out, you pull out!"

She puzzled for a second.

"You mean marry?"

"Well, that's your way out. You may land your victim by stooping to the lowest of measures——"

"Oh, not that," she interrupted. "We're simply not frank, perhaps not quite honest."

"Well that's crooked for you—you, with your bringing up, your advantages, your home. You're not hungry for bread, nor for glory. You have all the jewels you want—your price is love! The point of honor shifts as easily as the incentive!"

But she resented nothing, she acknowledged herself humbled to the dust.

"We're forced to resort to subterfuge, trickery, from the day we're born, from the day we first learn the word 'femininity,' from the day we sit in a ball room waiting for you to ask us to dance till the day you propose to love us."

"Even you haven't the courage to be honest!" He seemed to gloat on that, accentuating triumphantly the pronoun 'you.'

"No, not until we have succeeded, not until we know our love is returned. Then——"

He didn't know just why but the word *succeeded* seemed to beat upon his brain. "After you've succeeded?" he questioned earnestly.

"Oh, then it's different! Then the worst of us become the most devoted wives and mothers. Until now I have always succeeded; I have never been face to face with the necessity for effort until now!"

"And now you've risen to the occasion!"

She was suprised to see him smile as he said it. How he made her hate herself!

"I really am so sorry; you see you were a stranger to me when I began. Now that I have come to know the sort of man you are, so different from most men, so much finer—oh, really I am so sorry," she whispered.

Her words recalled him from the absurd flights to which he had flown. He had actually deceived her into thinking him fine! Well, there were moments when he had almost deceived himself. Then he heard her asking him to respect her confidence, to keep her secret.

"There, it's all right. I—I'm a fool," he said abruptly, and with sudden resolution moved away from her to join the others. He had only one thought now, one idea—how to turn the hospitality of these people to account. He wasn't there to enjoy himself, he was there for business. With that once more in his mind he made his way back to the others.

"Does you mother live with you?" he heard himself asking Mrs. Dunstan presently, for no reason at all except that he must make headway with her; he must see the house somehow, anyhow; he must get a working plan of it to hand over to the Justifiables. He believed he had recovered himself completely.

Mrs. Dunstan smiled upon him; she was really lovely when she smiled.

"I am going to show you how my mother lives with us," she said. "Come, we will call upon her in her rooms."

Lord, how easy these people were! He followed through the hall up some steps to an elevator. "Good," he said to himself. He was thinking that the steps would often be left unguarded. He seemed to see Cryder stealing up them, turning in that deft way of his, from side to side, noiselessly.

Mrs. Dunstan opened a door and he was transported into a typical Colonial room of another century. The lamp light showed a simple wainscot, an old fashioned flowered paper, low doors, long low windows divided into little squares of glass, a valance of chintz connecting the curtains; in one corner a good old bookcase, the kind with diamond panes; in another two small samplers lettering the moral teachings of another age. The incongruity and unexpectedness of it, in the midst of all their luxury and splendor, seemed somehow to grate on his nerves.

"My mother was born in the little town of Bennington," explained Mrs. Dunstan. "She was married there. My father died there. These rooms were fashioned after those she loved."

The old lady came through the door to welcome them. With her was a faded elderly person in black with a kind, frank face and a solicitous manner. She seemed the stronger of the two, for the older lady leaned upon her. "My faithful Maria," she called her, and she told how the woman had served her for fifty years. The two little wrinkled ladies stood smiling, one into the face of the other, servant and mistress.

He hadn't supposed houses like this, great sumptuous palaces, concealed such bits of sentiment. Then he found himself listening to praise of Arpad Dunstan from his mother-in-law.

"The best of men," she called him. "He did this for me. You must have a look at my garden!"

The faithful Maria opened a door that led to a conservatory laid out like an old-fashioned garden, a glory of phlox, geraniums, bleeding hearts and morning-glories.

"We sit here and dream, eh Maria?" Her faded eyes drank it in while Olmstead standing there beside her as she displayed her treasures—such treasures!—had suddenly a frightful vision of villainous faces surrounding and shocking her. He became ill at ease and showed it.

"When you have lived as long as I have you will appreciate the joys of peace," observed the old lady. "You have only just begun to live. You're young—with a great future before you!"

A great future! He had only to look at her to see that she meant it.

"Mr. Olmstead will come again," said Mrs. Dunstan, roguishly, "when he's older."

"Oh, I shall only be here a week or so," he said quickly.

"A week?" she echoed amazed. "Is M. de Guित्रy leaving too?"

"I don't know—that depends——"

She looked at him deeply, but he was in no humor for her confidences, and he contrived to get away from any possibility of them as soon as he could.

CHAPTER XV

IN the early morning Olmstead awoke with a feeling that the very walls were closing in upon him. The climax of his wonderful venture was fast approaching. It meant that he could no longer placate the Inner Circle with a jewel or two; nothing could hold them back from the big haul they had exploited him for. He belonged to them, body and soul; he must deliver the goods somehow. He had been congratulated upon his informal evening at the Dunstan's as a great feat; and, to prove their appreciation, they assured him they had their eyes upon the safe where Arpad kept his choicest jewels—the high-water mark of what they were pleased to call “their social skirmish.”

In the dull light Olmstead found himself blinking at what looked like the figure of an early Roman warrior. He sat up startled, and recognized the costume that was to be worn upon what he had decided must be his farewell to society, his costume for the Egyptian fête, where for the last time he expected to see Miss Blair. Guitry had selected it with much care and many compliments. From behind it now he could see the young Count's face looking at him with eyes of horror. That was unpleasant after he had idealized him so. Only a few nights before he had insisted that he had saved his life. Well, in a fashion

so he had, at least he had given him back his own. And now he could almost hear the word—“*Débacle*,” pronounced with Guitry’s facile, inimitable accent. Poor devil! If he—well, some one had to be sacrificed. In the back of his brain lurked that, while at the same time he began to consider, almost unconsciously, saving him again. After all one is bound to have a certain feeling of concern for a being whom one has once rescued. He closed his eyes and the room became peopled with mockers; among them, Guitry seemed to be standing at bay like himself.

It was only after he had dressed and breakfasted that he was able to bring his reason to bear against this depression.

Considering that he had been a thousand times more successful in this new strange world than he had expected to be, considering that he had won from Kate Dunstan far more than he had ever dreamed—her friendship, even her respect—his mood was absurd. Surely he wasn’t simple enough to fool himself into the belief that her confession of the night before had disappointed him! He had run the risk of discovery all his life. It was part of his game. He was in no greater danger now than always—less, far less; and he had still the check signed Mildred Dunstan. He was armed—all he needed was the courage to pull the trigger when the time came.

He fell to wondering what effect the news of Kate Dunstan’s confession would have upon Guitry when he heard it. He would tell him presently, but, as far as he could see, it would help him very little. At best it could only succeed in putting matters between them where they were before he had crossed their horizon. There would be explanations, meetings, discussions

that might eventually lead some where, but meanwhile——

A boy with a card interrupted his reverie. It seemed to him, as he read it, to bear the name of the only person in the world whom he wanted to see.

Below in the Japanese room Ethel Blair, of the "Era," waited. Earlier that morning she had thrown a quarter into the air—it was pay day—challenging fate which had decreed that she was to find out somehow about the rich Australian's attentions to Dunstan's daughter. It had even been suggested that she stop in at the Dunstan's again. It was then that she had thrown the quarter into the air murmuring—"Heads—Dunstan; Tails—Olmstead." It came down tails. If it had arrived heads she'd have cheated.

Ethel Blair waited uneasily. It was no fun going over her list of impertinent questions, the gist of them—"Do you intend to marry Miss Dunstan?"

Some day when she had left the newspaper world—when she had left it! Strange how she always dreamed of a day when she was no longer on a newspaper. How many people she had seen come and go even in the short time she had been a reporter! The young ones were always getting out. That was their ambition. And when they were once out they looked down upon those who had stayed in. That was bad. No other profession was like that. Most beginnings are ignoble; in all professions the beginner expects to do things that no one who has arrived will do. Serving a summons is anything but glorious, but the lawyer's clerk dreams not of the day when he will get out of the law, but of the day when he will establish himself in it to the point of pleading a case or reading a brief. The young architect who makes

tracings, the interne in a hospital, the actor who plays butler's parts, the actress cast for maid, the sailor, the mate, the drummer, even the social climber groping her way upon the shoulders of people for whom she has no respect, boasting the name of some lion to secure the attention of some snob—one and all they are in their chosen spheres to stay. But whoever heard of serving as an ignominious cog in order to desert——

Olmstead was coming towards her. Oh, if Kate Dunstan would only get off the face of the earth! What right had a woman who didn't want publicity to be always in the limelight?

Olmstead came nearer. In her mind she turned and twisted and dressed her questions, and led up to them gracefully, but when at last he was seated beside her she forgot all her preparation, and blurted out the most important and the most impertinent of them, flushing to what he thought new beauty.

So she had heard the gossip! And in the midst of all his serious worries he wondered if she cared.

"You would congratulate me if it were true?" he whispered at last.

She pressed her lips together and looked at him silently. Then, of all things in the world, she opened them to say, "Why should I? You have plenty of money!"

"But Miss Dunstan is charming, beautiful."

To which she made no reply except to give a faint smile that one might interpret to mean that certain people were weak-minded.

"You don't think so?" he asked with amusement.

"Oh—beauty!" she murmured faintly, scorning to add any platitudinous reflection as to its depth.

He looked at her with a really soothing, reassuring smile.

"There's nothing in your report; we're not engaged," he said softly, "and never will be."

It seemed to him she gave a startled little gulp which he couldn't quite interpret, though it might, of course, have been occasioned by regret at losing her story. He had suddenly a desire to find out.

"Are you sorry?" he asked.

"Indeed I am not!" she exclaimed impulsively.

"I was afraid you'd be disappointed."

"I don't admire Miss Dunstan," she volunteered, and started to button the cheap fur collar at her neck as though there were nothing more to stop for.

A small page in a trim little uniform, carrying a gleaming salver with several cards on it, wandered in from the corridor, calling out in a singsong voice the names of various guests. One arrested the attention of both Miss Blair and Olmstead.

"He won't find the Count," observed the latter.

"The Count?"

"Yes, Guitry——"

"Oh, I remember you know him!"

"Surely," he answered with unmistakable pride.

Miss Blair sat looking at him. Then she began to unbutton her collar again and said, "May I ask you about him?"

And presently, for the second time since he had known him, Olmstead found himself indorsing Guitry. At first this didn't seem to him at all extraordinary. A Count would naturally figure in the social news. He spoke of him with enthusiasm.

"Fine?" the girl echoed.

"Yes—a real aristocrat."

"Aristocrat?"

Suddenly the unmistakable irony of her tone struck upon his ears. What in thunder was the matter with her?

"And he lives here?" she asked.

It seemed to him a queer expression came into her eyes, and that she echoed the familiar name of the great hotel with a sort of triumph. What on earth was in her mind? Olmstead sat opposite her thinking hard, unsuccessfully. Then at last he began to ask questions himself. He must know what she was driving at.

Before she answered him, however, she became even more mysterious. What she had to tell, she informed him, was vastly important, and most unusual; he must give her his word that he would keep it a secret!

They withdrew into the embrasure of a window where, on a red velvet seat surrounded by red velvet pillows, they were less conspicuous.

"A real secret?" he asked blankly.

"Yes, you told me once I wasn't much of a newspaper woman. Well, now you'll see that I'm more of one than you thought! You probably don't know that your friend the Count has another name! Yes, on occasions he calls himself Monsieur Alain!" she observed with quite evident enjoyment of his confusion.

Presently Ethel Blair went back to the beginning. She told him she had answered the advertisement of a certain M. Alain.

She described the superior way in which the City Editor had told her to find out about it. She had written in her best hand to M. Alain. She had only signed her initials, and she had asked him to meet

her. She had received him in the stuffy public parlor of a hotel. Oh, that was foolish of course, she realized that afterwards. Then she had lost sight of him.

For a moment Olmstead actually thought of confessing everything, of throwing himself upon her mercy.

"He seemed more frightened than I," the girl went on evenly, "and asked if I had a chaperone. I saw that he was really a gentleman, up against it one might say."

So she knew—she knew! His depression had not been for nothing! He braced himself, while a tumult of feeling surged through him as he remembered that the Count had referred to some girl who had answered his advertisement. What a clumsy fool he had been! A whole newspaper office in possession of the facts! He turned faint at the realization of what that meant. Everything would be mercilessly exposed, beginning with the poor devil of a Count; one question would lead to another and so, inevitably, to him—investigation to investigation. Both of them in the power of this girl with her smooth, innocent face and soft, sweet voice. He raised his eyes and straightened, engrossing himself in her tale.

"Then I saw him at Mrs. Cartwright's—you remember at dinner—perhaps you didn't notice how I started! Oh no, he didn't recognize me but that was quite natural!"

From under the brim of her hat green gray eyes looked out at Olmstead mischievously.

"My Monsieur Alain," she exclaimed in conclusion. "It's the biggest story I've ever had! I must land it—it will make me!"

"Land it?" he echoed feebly.

"You don't understand," she said with a shade of superiority. "It's a real story, a story with enormous possibilities. The first thing was to establish his identity; I did that at Mrs. Cartwright's dinner——"

"When you were talking to me you really had one eye on him!" he said in reproach.

"Yes, but I didn't keep it there," she retorted. "I lost sight of him——"

"I'm glad of that!" Olmstead was certainly sincere.

"Now the great point is to find out if he has found someone to introduce!"

Yes, that was the point, but Olmstead certainly wasn't ready for her to make it. He closed his eyes a minute, and at the picture conjured up opened them quickly.

"My, but he must have been poor, wretchedly poor," he observed.

"Of course," she answered sharply, "but I've nothing to do with that! A Count in society, without a cent, putting up his title for sale—that's my business! And the man who would buy it! Imagine him! He must be a nice sort!" She looked at him to share her contempt.

Instead Olmstead went on voicing his dull train of thought, insisting that he could picture the poverty of the man who had written that advertisement.

"And he was brought up in luxury!" he said finally.

"No doubt!" Her tender little face had become hard and stern.

"A gentleman! God knows he must have suffered," he repeated. He seemed to have lost sight of her story completely.

But she brought him back to it. "How does he get money enough to live here, and to go to balls and things? Who gives it to him? That's what I want to find out!"

"I wonder!" Olmstead seemed to be considering deeply.

"Don't you see that someone is paying for him?"

"I see," he said.

"And someone is being introduced by him. Now, I must find that someone!"

"I see! I see!" Olmstead repeated slowly. "Exposure of the Frenchman and the friend he has introduced."

"Precisely!"

He had been educated in such glaring, hideous headlines as floated before his eyes now.

"So you've been following him all the time and making reports to the paper?" he asked presently.

"No I haven't; I—you see when instead of keeping an eye on him I lost sight of him, it didn't seem wise to confess it at the office. So I waited. Now I've found him again—and I'm ready——"

With some excitement she pulled her coat together, while Olmstead, all his stiffness suddenly vanished, settled himself among the cushions as if for a talk.

"Is it really possible only you and I are in the secret?" he exclaimed.

On that rather surprised question she gave him an intimate glimpse of the City Room, and the superior young editor who had roused her anger.

"Actually he makes it a rule never to acknowledge one of his staff in the street! He has a horror of people who would do such things as he demands of them! And he's merciless; in his eyes you're just a

piece of furniture, like the tables and chairs, to be moved at his will. Well, he moves you here, there, everywhere——”

“So you kept your secret——” Olmstead repeated, eyeing her meditatively. His face had grown light with relief at the passing of a moment when it had seemed to him that exposure was inevitable. Now he sat planning how best to avoid it, how at least to postpone it, even how to turn this threatened publicity to account, and make it serve his purpose.

“I am so glad you came to me,” he said at last genially. “I have something most important for you, a really bully story in place of the one I couldn’t give you.”

Then, very carefully, he went on to connect for her the names of the Count de Guitry and Katherine Dunstan.

Afterwards Olmstead realized that he had not been altogether clear in his own mind as to just how far he intended to go, but if Guitry had to be exposed, it seemed to him it could do no harm for the world to know, at least, Kate Dunstan’s regard for him. She should suffer, too. If she loved him she could look out for him——

Meanwhile he observed, with some curiosity, that the girl beside him was wavering between being intensely shocked and positively joyful.

“Oh, I am glad,” she gurgled maliciously. “It’s only what she deserves!”

“But what have you against the lady?”

“Miss Dunstan? Perhaps I’ll tell you some time—not now. I’m going to get even with her first. It’s my chance—we don’t often get a chance like this.”

She arose, made a speculative little tour of the

room, and came back, evidently quite decided. By the time she returned he had decided too.

"What are you going to do?" he asked with much interest. "I can't exactly make out——"

"Well, you'll see in the morning," she answered firmly.

Olmstead sat looking at this slip of a thing holding two such destinies in her hands. Presently he went back to the Count's courtship, describing it from the beginning with many interpolations and side lights. At the end of it he said complacently: "There's a story for you!"

"So you believe he's really in love with her," she asked, "really and truly?"

"I know it."

"And she with him?"

"Madly!"

"She won't be tomorrow morning when she knows more about him!" she exclaimed. "I guess that will make her feel cheap!"

Then Olmstead took matters into his own hands.

"Is that all there is to it?" he asked with a show of contempt.

"You mean?"

"I mean just to make her feel cheap."

"Well, that's something!"

Olmstead seemed to consider deeply before he asked:

"But are you going to announce the engagement?"

"Engagement? Why I thought he was only attentive to her!"

"Oh, then I didn't make you understand——"

"Are they really engaged?" she asked with some excitement.

"Certainly. If you must have it, she told me herself—well never mind just what, but their engagement is positive." He sat nodding at her, reassuringly. Then he added, "She would never forgive me if she thought I had betrayed her confidence." He firmly believed this to be true.

But she assured him he could trust her to be most careful how she gave out the news; she wouldn't reveal the source of it for the world.

"Particularly when her fiancé is such an adventurer!" she cried.

"Ah, now I see your point," Olmstead exclaimed, after a moment, in his most flattering tone.

Miss Blair stared at him blankly.

"I see what you have in mind! If you announce the engagement, and tell the Count's unfortunate story in the same article, Miss Dunstan will simply deny that she has any intention of marrying him. She'll throw your story down; that's what worries you!"

He clasped his hands over his knees and sat looking at her.

"Well, yes, that's possible," exclaimed Miss Blair.

"So the story of the Count's advertisement must wait till after you've announced his engagement, even I see that! But you needn't worry," he added quickly; "no one knows about the advertisement but you and me, and I assure you you can trust me."

"Oh I know I can!"

"As for the engagement—" he shrugged expressively.

"Well, after all, my assignment today was to find out about Miss Dunstan's plans, and about you——"

They lapsed into silence; a sudden embarrassment

seemed to fall between them. It lasted until Olmstead said briskly:

"By tomorrow I can tell you a lot more about them. I'm to meet the Count this afternoon."

"Oh find out if you can whom he is introducing—will you?" she asked with an assumption of great eagerness.

"Come in tomorrow morning," he replied with one of his most engaging smiles.

He had gained twenty-four hours respite and all because the girl had confided in him.

Suppose she had told someone else? Suppose some other man—naturally he thought a great deal about Ethel Blair. What a dear, innocent, trusting, little person she was! And so unprotected! So utterly unfit for her job! So unfit for any useful job but that of caring for a husband and children!

Suppose she should fall in love with someone unworthy! How horrible!

CHAPTER XVI

OBVIOUSLY the copyreader on a great newspaper, who is hired to rewrite holds his job by rewriting. If there is nothing to rewrite—how absurd! On this occasion there was Ethel Blair's story. She handed it in early.

She had written it as a woman writes when at her best. Olmstead would read it. She was satisfied that it was done with subtlety, with finesse, with insinuation, with feeling, with imagination, with poetry. What if its life were only for a day? She knew that she would be read. She had a drawer full of rejected manuscripts which, to test the publishers, she had sent out with pages glued together, in packages tied with odd and unusual knots, with sheets adroitly mixed—the test had opened her eyes. All one asks is to be read.

Her interview with Olmstead she wrote and rewrote, ardently, exhaustlessly, devotedly. She summoned her author heroes and modeled her paragraphs to the lessons of their style. Henry James and his disciples, Kipling, Stevenson—she paid tribute at their shrines; she went through moments of discouragement to rise triumphant on a phrase that pleased; she reviewed and revised.

So, completely satisfied, she handed her story in over the shabby desk to the important young editor, and went home to visualize it in print. The look of

it pleased her. It would have been so easy to slip into cheap heroics and write of the fortunate heiress and her aristocratic suitor, so difficult to refrain from it. To guard her secret and yet to prepare for it—that was her task. In trying to make her characters live she experienced almost the glory of creation. In the night several times she awoke to weigh her words: Love—woman's destiny—possibly some day—rumor—gossip—oh what a Godsend those last two words! She had been most careful not to give a hint of the source of her information; she went to sleep dreaming of it.

When it appeared the following morning, the article measured a full column and a half, not counting the headlines.

Mrs Dunstan came upon it even before she had breakfasted, and, leaving her chocolate to thicken and chill, and her toast untasted, she made her way to her daughter's bedroom with a copy of the *Era* in her hand.

"You can't be more shocked than I am!" she announced.

Her daughter reached out a sleepy hand, and then sat up to read, aghast and trembling.

"Impertinence!" her mother went on. "Just because this Frenchman happens to be in New York. His fortune, indeed!"

Kate brushed the hair from her eyes and pored over the paragraphs.

"Oh those terrible newspapers—I'm glad your father arrives tomorrow—you who have scarcely seen M. de Guitry!"

Mrs. Dunstan uttered these phrases, and then waited.

"It must be denied at once," she said in the long pause that followed. "We shall sue for libel."

At last her daughter spoke.

"Something must be done—" she murmured returning to the newspaper.

"But how you must feel!"

"Yes—I do—" Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes their bluest, clear, eager.

She sprang from her bed, wide awake, full of energy. She must have her bath at once. Léontine was despatched for her breakfast tray. She had a thousand things to attend to, notes to write, people to see.

Mrs. Dunstan watched her uneasily and, as she dashed about the room in her diaphanous white, she said slowly:

"I am surprised that Mr. Olmstead would permit himself to be interviewed! Naturally you are indignant! I can quite understand——"

Kate had disappeared into the bathroom and, with the sound of running water in her ears, Mrs. Dunstan recalled her first conversation with Olmstead. Did this mean that there was indeed something she should know? Had he kept his word—perhaps not in the way she would have liked—but still kept it?

Kate looked out from the bathroom. Her mother had disappeared and the telephone was ringing shrilly. She caught it up to hear Alice Belknap's voice protesting at the other end that she hadn't betrayed her!

"Oh that Olmstead? And I made you! But I never dreamed—believe me I thought he could be trusted! You'll never forgive him— What? Of course the moment Guitry knows, you'll be sure to hear from him— What? You haven't heard yet? Well, you will— The point is Guitry! I see! Leave him

to me and come to lunch. Wear that heavenly blue gown with the panels, and a big hat, the drooping one with the gray feather—leave the rest to me——”

Olmstead smiled expectantly as he turned the pages of the Era. He skimmed the columns over hastily until suddenly he came to one at which he paused with a sort of grim pleasure, short lived, for as he read he stiffened and sat frowning.

Was it possible he had misjudged the girl to this extent? That above all his first thought! The sympathy of her voice rang in his ears as he muttered an oath to think how he had been duped by her apparent innocence. He smoothed the paper in his hand and went at it again, enraged, humiliated. Of all the damnable treachery—of all the cruel, unforgiveable betrayals! How could she? It was inexplicable! What had he done to her? How nonsensical! She had fooled him, tricked him, that was all; and why should he have expected anything else? She had played his own game and won out! Of course she meant never to see him again.

He laughed aloud and pulled himself together to read down the article once more.

At least in her rhapsodies about the lovely heiress and the noble aristocrat she had given no hint of the secret behind the Count's return to society. Another few hours respite! Meanwhile he saw ahead of him some most unpleasant moments. He got up and locked his doors to postpone one of them. He couldn't stand the sight of Guitry now, Guitry with his sense of honor and his sense of taste, reproaching him for those vulgar headlines.

He pictured the revolution that the interview would

create in the Dunstan household, that household of peace and refinement! How the proud Kate would regret that she had ever taken him into her confidence! How she would despise him! He pictured the mother (Mildred as he always called her to himself), worried and disturbed as to the effect it would have upon her Arpad. It was a nasty return for all her kindness. And just now most awkward. And the grand-mother, the white-haired old lady, leaning on her faithful Maria—he hoped he hadn't shocked her. Well, whether he had or hadn't, the fat was in the fire now and they could dish it out to suit themselves. As far as he was concerned the sooner they began the better. After all what did their reproaches matter? The more bitter they were the easier it would be for him to end it all.

The plans for the invasion of the Dunstan house, with just such treasures as were to be annexed, with a specially emphasized paragraph that marked a certain wing as dangerous and carefully to be avoided, were ready and waiting. He had intended to have one more fling in the social world, that night at the Egyptian ball, one more fling as the Australian millionaire, but now——

There was a knock at the door, and not Guitry but a messenger asked for entrance. It was Jimmy McCarthy, with his Irish face and his brass buttons both aglow, stretching his mouth to a smile that revealed the last of his molars. He removed from the inner flap of his cap a note, and handed it to the man who had made his uniform and his mission possible.

"An' it's Miss Dunstan as sez——" But he was learning and broke off with a sudden, "From Miss Dunstan—Sir."

Olmstead tore open the heavy, gray envelope and sat overwhelmed. He turned the pages back and forth, skimming over and over the bold, free writing. He took it in slowly. For the third time he read:

"Your first feeling when I made my confession to you was one of indignation. You were right in all you said, and you have roused in me something I never felt before—a sense of my littleness. You have also made me grateful beyond expression, for now André de Guित्रy must know what I dared not tell him. Oh how I wanted him to know!

So I thank you from my heart, I thank you——"

He turned the page.

"I must tell you that I'd probably have gone on with my wretched game if it hadn't been for Alice Belknap, the best friend a girl ever had——"

Olmstead read on silently and then he observed.

"You never can tell about women, Jimmy."

Jimmy had never taken his eyes from his face.

"Can't you?" he asked pityingly.

"Can you?"

"Sure," said Jimmy, "me aunt's gone again."

"Did she tell you she was going?"

"Nope, but I know'd it. 'An' she'll be back Monday," he added with conviction.

"Did she say so?"

"Nope, but Monday's me pay day——"

On the heels of Miss Dunstan's note came a message over the 'phone from Mrs. Belknap. She begged that he would lunch with her. He learned that it was tremendously important, and that Guित्रy was coming. Then, before he could hang up the receiver, he was told that a certain Miss Blair of the Era was waiting for him.

Olmstead came out into the corridor and walked down towards Guitry's room. The door was wide open. A neat chambermaid looked over at him across the bed that she was pulling to pieces—the gentleman had gone out. Olmstead glanced hurriedly about the room. Guitry's breakfast dishes were still on the table and against his small pot of coffee was balanced "*Le Matin*"—*comme d'habitude!* He had been, as ever, quite content to learn from his Paris newspaper what had happened in America the week before.

In a fever of anxiety Miss Blair had come to the hotel to keep her appointment with Olmstead. One has to be young, young in talent, young in ambition, young in experience, young in the world of writers, to be as indignant as she had been when she saw her tortured, deformed, mutilated story. Since then she had passed through some terrible hours, during which she had been made to realize to the full, that if any article handed in at the Era office failed of its mark, it was due to no such cause as that given by a certain learned Professor in accounting for the unsuccessful result of his collaboration with a famous playwright.

"We were too infernally polite to each other," he explained sadly.

When, finally, Ethel Blair took the City Editor to task for the betrayal of her confidences, which, for once, he had drawn from her, his language, unexpurgated—well a sample of it still rang in the little reporter's ears——

"Damned if this Count mightn't be a day laborer engaged to a waitress for all you made of it! Good God, you had him disposed of in three paragraphs! This Frenchman's got a title—and estates; he's a

personage, a catch! And you—you give him the same kind of notice you'd give a man who had to work for his living! One would think we ran a kindergarten here instead of a newspaper!"

Then it was that Ethel Blair had determined that she'd have her moment whatever its cost. When she saw that her article had taken the form of an interview with Olmstead she was convinced that what she wanted, above everything, was to show this man, who carried a blue pencil with as much arrogance as a Prussian officer carries his stripes, that she knew what she was about. She could say d——n too! She said it now, under her breath: "D——n his blue pencil!"

She almost broke down when Olmstead assured her that he was entirely satisfied with what she had written, or rather what she had not written, since she was so indignant with it herself. She had been afraid that he would never have faith in her again. She confessed to him that not all the fame and money in the world was worth that to her. In her abject mood she made no effort to hide what he had become to her. And he, realizing the madness of it, permitted, in fact, encouraged her.

He loved her voice—it was so deliciously soft when she told him how she had suffered thinking that he would credit her with that awful stuff, after he had trusted her. She described to him how she had gone down to the office at once, and had marched straight up to the City Editor with the paper in her hand.

"So you told him what you thought of him?" he said, at last beginning to sense some disturbing revelation.

"More than that," she exclaimed. "You should have heard me! What I told him made him sit up!"

Olmstead came to himself and sat up too. While the procession of meaningless people about them was gradually transformed into daughters met by mothers, into wives with their husbands, into sisters, into sweet-hearts, into suburban girls, into matinée girls—he sat listening to the newspaper girl who, with every word of her soft voice, was pulling the coils tighter and tighter about him.

The City Editor had cold steel gray eyes and light thin hair; he chewed on a piece of gum in a desperate endeavor not to smoke day and night; he was that kind of man. According to Miss Blair he seemed honestly to think she had gone crazy when in a low sarcastic tone she had hissed out, "Estates? He's as poor as a church mouse. Title? Up for sale to the highest bidder! Aristocrat! How he must be laughing in his sleeve at that stuff! Palaces—" She proceeded to throw them down in an ignominious heap. Then, when her superior officer had begun to apologize, she had, womanlike, blurted out her whole secret. In drawn breaths, with heaving breast, catching her words up like a child, she had revealed the Count's alias. She had kept an eye on her Monsieur Alain to some purpose. They thought she was a fool—well she'd show them! When she handed in her second day story they'd understand that even the Count de Guitry, posing under another name, might be an adventurer!

Arpad Dunstan's daughter engaged to an adventurer! The joy of it brought the City Editor, chewing violently, to her side. Miss Blair was treated by him now with the tenderness of an elder brother. If she had been a man she was certain he'd have handed her

a cigar. He actually gloated over her. He wanted every detail she could give him.

"He'll never snub me again," she cried. "And now that you're satisfied and don't mind, I can't tell you how happy I am!"

Olmstead had suddenly become strangely irresponsible, strangely silent. But she went on bravely:

"The only thing I have to find out now is, who pays the Count's bills?"

Olmstead stiffened without uttering a word.

"There's no doubt he has found someone to introduce, that's certain!"

"Why?" he managed to throw out.

"He couldn't live in this extravagant hotel if he hadn't. How could he afford it?" She paused eloquently. "Oh no, he's found someone! Who? That's the point? Who?"

She sat waiting for Olmstead to help her with some suggestion.

"Well, it's too bad," he said at last. Reviewing the situation from every side he could see no way out, absolutely none.

He heard Miss Blair say, "You're sorry for him!" And he heard himself answer, "Very——"

Then, under her startled eyes, he settled down among the cushions and repeated in a strange, hard tone: "Who pays his bills? Oh, I can tell you who does that." She sat with wide eyes while he observed with a smile: "I do."

With that he waited, both hands on his knees; whatever the turmoil within, outwardly calm as ever.

For a moment she seemed stunned, then she looked at him as though expecting some further explanations.

"I answered the advertisement too," he said defiantly.

"You who know everyone!" exclaimed the girl.

"Well, suppose I do!" With that he jumped to the defensive, lamely.

During the silence that followed he saw, with amazement, that she was exerting all her self-control to keep back the tears that were welling up in her eyes, to hide the trembling of her lips.

"Oh, what must you think of me!" she burst out. "Here I was hounding him while you—you were trying to help him."

He remained silent, puzzled to understand just what she meant.

"You found him and helped him, while I—I intended only to make capital out of him, to betray him." She went on accusing herself. "I let him escape, not because I had a conscience, or a heart, but because I couldn't land him. I see what you're trying to do," she said slowly, "you're trying to save him and make a man of him for her! You care for her that way, even if she doesn't deserve it!"

Olmstead was speechless. She never suspected him for a moment. That was the amazing thing! She had accepted him, trusted him, believed in him and now she reasoned from that trust, that belief. What a friend! What a girl to be with, to work for, to live for!

"What on earth did Miss Dunstan do to you anyway?" he asked at last.

"Being a reporter, you must understand," she said in a low, passionate voice, "isn't like staying in an office, protected behind the cover of a desk. You've got to go out trying to get things, stories they call them, and photographs, which depend upon someone else; that's the tragedy of it. And nine times out of

ten you're up against it, as they say. No one in the office cares how you get things. What you get is the point! Sometimes people are courteous and trust you——"

"Then they bring out the best in you!" exclaimed Olmstead.

"But they're more often suspicious and rude, especially if they're millionaires——"

"Then it's the devil they rouse!" he interrupted her again.

"But you—you understand!" cried the girl.

"They put you upon your honor when they trust you, and if there's a vestige of good in you it answers the call!"

"But you haven't heard all! I went to Miss Dunstan's house to interview her. I heard what she said to her butler. He had shown me into the reception room, thinking I was a lady. I sat there behaving like one until—until I heard her tell him I wasn't. She was right, but it was she who put the thought into me. As she spoke my eyes fell upon the picture of a woman in a ball gown, standing on the table, in a frame; I wasn't trusted anyway; I was head over ears in debt; I had to turn in a story; the picture, at least, with the description of the home would be something; I wanted a costume for tonight; I had pawned everything I could——"

"Stop," interposed Olmstead firmly. "Whatever you've done don't tell me! I've known temptation myself, and what it means."

They looked deep into each other's eyes.

"How on earth did a millionaire ever get such an understanding of things?" she asked in wonder.

"But I'm not a millionaire," said Olmstead suddenly.

"No, you're something else!" she exclaimed. "I realized that when I saw you in the court the day you appeared for the little newsboy, the day you told me I wasn't a good newspaper woman. Go on thinking that of me," she said under her breath, "and trust me as a woman—just as a woman——"

Something in the pallor of her face frightened him.

"What are you going to do?" he asked anxiously.

"Trust me," she breathed again, and this time she looked at him with a gay little smile. "I'll tell you to-night—only trust me and have no fear——"

With that she led the way out. When they were in the busy, noisy hall among telephone booths, taxi calls and revolving doors she said, looking at him with a comical little smile:

"I've only one thing against you—you spoiled my story about the picture!"

"Oh, I know you took it," he said carelessly.

"Well, yes; but that wasn't the reason I had for telling you about it. Do you suppose I'd ever have confessed that if there hadn't been more to it—if it hadn't led to something else? The point was that I didn't give it in," she whispered, "I mailed it back—because of you. That's what I wanted you to know!"

"Because of me?"

"Yes, after I heard what you said in court—after our interview—after you said I was a pretty good kind of woman."

"We're all the same—just human; you and Jimmy, the newsboy—and I—in one short week."

His voice was a mere breath, but she was sure he included himself, which was nice of him she thought.

She threw him one last smile, her lips framed again the words: "Trust me——"

And as she turned away he knew that, for the first time in his life, there was some one in whom he had faith. Oh, the glorious day!

A man came in with a dripping umbrella—it was a glorious day anyway! Ethel Blair was his friend! If he could only keep her—if he could only keep her!

When Olmstead arrived at Mrs. Belknap's, the lady herself met him in the hall.

"Give them a moment," she whispered mischievously, adding with great enjoyment: "They've only been together an hour! What you've done for them!"

"Brought them together!" he said with a smile, quite as though it were what he had planned.

"No one else would have dared! You dare and you're forgiven! It's your roughness that's done it; you've stayed in your frame; you've never even smoothed down the edges!"

"You mean I don't fit?"

"I mean that you've forced us to accommodate ourselves to you; that's leadership! We either accept you as you are, or not at all. Oh, you have power; the question is how you will use it. See what you have accomplished here——"

She coughed, and opened the door to the drawing room.

On the threshold Olmstead found himself acclaimed from both sides. Guitry grasped his hand and cried unreservedly:

"I owe to him everything!"

Kate whispered an enthusiastic echo.

"Gently—gently—" said Olmstead.

"You will be my best man!"

"Our dearest friend!"

Enthusiastically they heaped their thanks upon him, seemingly anxious, both of them, to make amends for a situation that must have brought him pain.

"Serve champagne," Mrs. Belknap whispered to her butler as they filed into the dining room. He heard it with a look of pained surprise that lasted all through luncheon. They certainly did behave strangely for people of the highest class. They giggled and held hands under the table—and, worst of all, dispensed with his services at the earliest possible moment, declaring they would wait on themselves.

"Here's to the future!" The couple drank looking into each other's eyes.

"To the castle at Amiens! May we soon recover it!"

"To our first guests!"

"To the one who has restored us to life!"

Through three courses they gave themselves up to the joy of the reunion.

"Alice!"

Kate crossed the room to kiss her friend. Returning she linked her arm in Olmstead's, called him "Jack," and drank with him to eternal brotherhood.

Olmstead wiped his brow. Kate would have sworn she understood why. It only made her the more tender with him. They all conspired to show him admiration, gratitude, confidence. Mrs. Belknap couldn't refrain from an occasional—"I told you so!" under her breath, while she declared him the most amazing of young men—capable of anything.

Olmstead it was, at last, who restored them to their senses. After all, the very same conditions that had confronted them six months before existed today.

"Except there's one thing," cried Kate exultantly. "It is no longer a secret, and that we owe to Jack!"

"Yes, but what are you going to do?" asked Jack.

"I'm not a child; they can't lock me up!"

As for Guitry he declared no sacrifice too great. He was willing to do anything; to be engaged and then let Kate break it off, even if it killed him; to wait indefinitely, no matter how long; to go or to stay, until they could get the consent of all the family.

Olmstead sat silent while they formulated every sort of scheme but the one he was determined to carry off. At last he had his chance. They turned to him, hanging breathless on what he would say.

And when he had said it, Kate it was who cried, "God bless you!" He never admired her more than at that moment. She was sincere, determined, the American girl at her best, courageous, willing to sacrifice everything for her love.

"When it's all over," she said finally, "someone will come to the rescue. Meanwhile, these must go!"

She took off her string of pearls and held them out to Olmstead. "They're worth something—you'll sell them for us."

Olmstead pushed them away almost rudely, and she believed again she understood.

"There's no hurry," he said gruffly. "Wait until after the ceremony."

Suddenly he seemed to have the greatest respect for the conventions, and demanded what they were going to do about Mrs. Dunstan.

"Oh, poor dear Mamma! I forgot to tell you she sent you a message; she called out to me, as I left the house, that, if it hadn't been for you, she wouldn't have known. She's grateful to you, shocked but grateful."

At any other time he might have been surprised at this extraordinary news, but not now, nothing was

extraordinary now. As he looked at the happy, excited couple before him he thought of his own future, and in it was actually mirrored Ethel Blair! It had, gradually, become very clear to him that all he did would be with a view to her. If only she were to keep her faith in him! In this day of surprises he dreamed even of that!

Presently he was quite calmly insisting that Mrs. Dunstan must be present at the wedding, the details of which he was quite willing to leave to the principals, since it had been decided that it was to be no later than the next day.

But Kate explained that her mother's presence would be impossible—even unfair. She launched forth into what she was pleased to call “all about her mother,” and ended with, “Mamma has never had a secret from Papa in her life!”

Olmstead listened impenetrable. But he insisted. At any moment Mildred Dunstan might become necessary to him, vitally necessary. The patient at the hospital could only last a few hours more, and then—well, he insisted.

With Mrs. Belknap to declare he was a born commander, with the Count murmuring that if he, who had already done so much, thought so, and with Kate calling down the blessings of Heaven upon him—he was able to carry his point.

CHAPTER XVII

AN IDEAL night! Stars in the sky and frost in the air. Vehicle after vehicle congested the street, dropping mysterious figures in strange and unconventional garb. Priests, patricians, philosophers, warriors, lictors, emperors, kings, senators, princesses, satraps, slaves, eunuchs, water carriers, clowns, acrobats formed a procession of wreaths and sceptres, togas and tunics, robes and mantles, waving fans, gleaming spears, shining helmets, graceful palms, glittering crowns and fantastic head-dresses! All the colors of the rainbows of all climes rioted, appropriate and inappropriate jewels of all ages flashed.

It was the last big festivity of the season to usher in Lent, a great Egyptian fête in the studio of a famous artist who had known how to transform it with textiles and columns, with flowers and pedestals, with clever tricks and genuine antiquities. The most beautiful women in New York were there to assist.

On a raised platform the Queen of the Nile in her pavilion ("cloth of gold tissue") under her canopy of enchantments, received the homage of the tribes of all the earth.

Delightful inconsistencies, glaring incongruities and genuine surprises prostrated themselves before her. A herd of slave girls, driven at the lash of a whip, were discovered wearing jeweled crowns and precious

pendants. Serious men, who had seemed all their lives to disdain frivolity, appeared laden with gewgaws and decked out in glaring colors, while "those dressy old things who have reached the frozen latitudes beyond fifty," whom one would have sworn had long since abjured the desire for youth, were now in curled and flowing wigs in an endeavor to recall it.

Antony appeared, trumpets shouted, cymbals clashed, and the play was on—a play within a play!

Garbed in the scanty East Indian costume of the retainer, attendants stood about everywhere, ready at hand for any service.

On piles of Eastern rugs the fantastic audience grouped themselves. Patrons of art and their friends, lovers of art and their friends, writers about art and their friends, publishers of art works and their friends, even artists themselves, every one who was any one had somehow managed to get an invitation.

A turbaned, trousered maid of Persia stood near a splendid figure in a scarlet robe with a wreath of laurel encircling his straight black hair.

"I've something to tell you," she whispered, looking at him with eyes green as the gauze that floated in oriental fashion over her lips, "Something important—but the Count, is he here?"

"With Kate Dunstan over there, in Heaven."

He nodded in the direction of a pile of rugs where a young Greek poet, of a pronounced French type, leaned over a graceful Egyptian, with long black curls hiding her pale gold hair, wearing a robe of purple gauze embroidered in topazes. Her eyes were radiant.

"I'd never have known her!"

"The spirit of costume!" Olmstead actually felt the thrill of it under the folds of his crimson mantle.

He was a great Roman General, a man of courage and noble deeds

"She's transfigured!" said the Maid of Persia.

"She has found her soul!" breathed the soldier.

"You believe she'll be happy?"

"Absolutely."

"And he?"

"The best of her responds to the best in him."

"Isn't she gorgeous? And look at that diamond star in her veil!"

Olmstead looked and fell to earth ignominiously.

"Paste," he said in contempt.

"Of course, in this crowd there's nothing real. Look there!"

A Queen of Sheba in gold brocade passed near them. The braids of her hair were twined with pearls. On her neck were strands of beads. Here and there her dress was caught with jeweled stones. Olmstead noted a strange mixture of real and imitation.

"One of those diamond stars is real," he observed, learnedly.

"What eyes you have!"

The soldier laughed and a passing Bacchante threw a lotus flower at his feet. On the stage snake charmers, jugglers, dancers, singers, clowns, acrobats followed one another to the tune of love. Marc Antony bent over Cleopatra under their draped canopy. The veil on Potiphar's wife swept the cheek of the young Greek poet. The Roman soldier and the Maid of Persia were now in an angle of the ball-room sheltered behind a spreading palm.

"There'll be another story for you tomorrow," he said, "one you'll like."

"Oh, not for me."

"Why not?"

"You'll see." Then she drew close to him and whispered:

"When I got back to the office I found they were getting up a story on Thieves in Society."

Olmstead kept his control with effort, echoing her phrase feebly.

"They were raking up every bit of information about everyone who isn't well known, or who has been unfortunate in business, or who is new in society, or of whom there might be a question."

"But what's the idea—" he began, and then broke off wondering if in her mind there was at last a suspicion.

"They had begun to find out all they could about the Count," she went on in a low tone.

"It's Guित्रy they suspect?" he cried in amazement.

"Well, they did, after my report about him. A Count with an alias! And I'm afraid, now, that they may come across someone else who answered his advertisement; they may hear how poor he was and how you helped him. And if anything of that sort comes out now—oh it mustn't."

Olmstead was rapidly recovering composure.

"So people have been losing things," he observed meditatively.

"Yes; and there's this——"

From some fold of her drapery she pulled out a small roll of paper.

"Read it when you get a chance," she said hurriedly. "It's to be in the morning paper; don't show it here! Hide it!"

He slipped it, completely nonplussed, into his broad sash.

"It's the galley proof of an article scheduled for tomorrow morning."

"Yours?" interposed the bewildered Olmstead.

"No, no; it's a cable from Europe; some stuff about an association of thieves, with headquarters here, and a representative in society. I stole it," she said with a heavenly smile.

"Don't use that word," he protested feebly.

"But I thought you ought to see it."

The girl looked steadily, proudly into his eyes. She had done this for him! He recovered again and stood thinking hard.

"Do they mention Guitry here?" he asked at last.

"No, no; don't you understand? They depended upon me to establish his identity as Monsieur Alain, and when I told them I couldn't——"

"I knew you'd do that! I knew it!"

"Of course," she said joyously. "I was mistaken. I made that clear to them with apologies for my stupidity."

"And you did it because——" His fierce anxiety relieved, he wanted to hear the reason fall from her lips.

"Because you—you are the man he introduced; because they'd have held you up to ridicule or worse."

"Because you know one of your intended victims——" he reached over and took her hand—"and like him a little."

The girl leaned towards him.

"I like him well enough to be here tonight where I don't belong. I've lost my job," she said with a gay little nod. "I'm no longer a newspaper woman—good or bad. I've used my card, Miss Blair of the Era, for the last time to pass myself in here—to you."

"If it hadn't been for their romance——"

"Oh wonderful romance!"

"What would Kate Dunstan say if she knew what we know?"

"Why she'd forgive him; she'd find some excuse," declared the girl promptly. "After all, selling an introduction——" she shrugged as though it were an everyday affair.

"But you were horrified!"

"Oh, he didn't attract me," she explained philosophically.

"Do you think if you were to care for some one—I mean really care—you could overlook—forgive more—oh much more than that?"

"If I really cared—I? I wouldn't want to know anything to forgive. When one is in love the past is an episode; the future only belongs to—well to——"

"To her!" breathed Olmstead.

Suddenly he moved away from her and pulled himself up sharply. The look of tenderness fled. No wonder! One of the East Indian retainers with soft step, imperturbable in his ebony mask, had ferreted them out and was offering them pink punch—punch at that time! It was a mere philosopher who said, "All mankind loves a lover." Punch when two young people had forgotten that just beyond their shelter was a world of tricksters and censors!

Olmstead turned away with unmistakable impatience. He held a spreading branch to one side, and Ethel Blair moved out into the room, brushing close to the brilliant Queen of Sheba with her gleaming jeweled front—strange mixture of stones, imitation and real. But something had happened to disturb Olmstead further.

The soft stepping East Indian, in handing his glasses, had come in contact with the girl's elbow. She had overturned his waiter, and, amid a chorus of ejaculations and some confusion, he was now engaged in wiping up the drops of liquid, and picking up the broken glass. The damage was slight. To repair it took only a minute. The East Indian moved away silently, softly, as he had come.

Olmstead pulled the sash that held what he called his drapery into place, and stood looking at Miss Blair. She returned his glance and saw there something unexpected, an expression she couldn't fathom, a mingling of consternation and pity. How should she dream that the floor beneath him seemed to be giving way? He felt as though he were sinking and dragging her down with him. How could she dream that, in the flash of an instant, a devilish design had unfolded itself before his eyes?

He turned to her with strange irritation, he who a moment ago had been so tenderly eager. She was certain she hadn't been mistaken about him.

"Oh, if only you hadn't left the newspaper!" His tone was anything but gentle.

"But I couldn't stay and take their money and betray them!" she remonstrated in wonder.

"And you have no right to be here!" He almost groaned this out.

She was puzzled, but she threw back her head superbly. "There seemed to me every reason why I should come, as I told you; however I'm going now."

"No, wait a minute; forgive me!" He spoke in a low level tone, but with great concern. "Do you want to do me a service?" he asked earnestly. "You do—

you must! You must get back on the staff of your paper!"

"I can't; I had a scene with the city editor; he was disgusted with my stupidity. I can't go back."

"You must; you must!"

"I can't," she answered distractedly.

"Yes, you can. Tomorrow, at noon, at Mrs. Belknap's, there will be a secret marriage—Arpad Dunstan's daughter and the Count de Guित्रy! You alone can get the story. You will go back to your office, now, and tell them—tell them you came here to get the details of that wedding. Don't mention me—but be at Mrs. Belknap's tomorrow at noon. I'll meet you there. Meanwhile go back and apologize to them! Go! go!"

She had once seen Julia Marlowe with puzzled, distracted expression on the verge of madness as Hamlet exhorted her—"To a nunnery go!" She thought of her now. She heard Olmstead say, "You have trusted me—trust me now as I trusted you! You have believed in me—believe still and go!"

He left her; crossed the room and with as little compunction as the indiscriminating East Indian, he who should have known better, broke in upon the Greek poet and the incongruous lady of his dreams, the Egyptian of the dark curls. He made strange exactions. He said he felt neglected, swore he knew no one; asked to be introduced right and left. Then he became most difficult to please. His eyes roamed restlessly while the Ethiopian slave with her skin of purple black, who had just emerged from a bale of carpet borne by four Nubian giants with bodies of bronze, danced on the stage to the clanging of cymbals and piping of flutes.

The Count found for him a Semiramis. He pronounced her dull. Kate presented him to veiled ladies, to slaves, to shepherdesses, to Roman aristocrats, to Vestals. He protested he was not interested in any of them. He expressed a liking only for those splendid figures in rich colors and brilliant brocades. He pursued one after the other until, finally, some one presented him to the gorgeous Queen of Sheba.

She seemed to engross him entirely. He remained with her for some time, apparently absorbed and fascinated by her.

Before he left he was able to draw her attention to a gleaming jewel, a diamond star, which must somehow have been caught in the drapery of her gown; it was just falling as he discovered it. He helped her replace it where it belonged. He heard her exclaim—"Think of it! It's real—this one! And I might have lost it if it hadn't been for you!" Which was true from more points of view than she realized.

Later he approached Kate Dunstan with a strange request. He made it with so little ceremony that it startled her.

"Let me have that star in your veil," he said.

"Nonsense!"

"You must," he insisted.

"It will spoil my costume."

"Did you mean it when you said you were grateful to me, that you would do anything for me?"

"Yes," she said promptly.

"Then give me that star!"

"Why, it's paste!"

"Well, all the more reason why I may ask for it."

"How nonsensical we all are tonight!"

"Give it to me!" he cried ardently.

"Why but—I——"

"Let me look at it!" He went back to it over and over till at last she took it off. And when he wouldn't let her have it back she decided that he was, indeed, the queerest man she had ever known.

Above the degenerate tum-tum of the one-step the blare of a trumpet sounded!

A line of Greek maidens with wreaths on their heads and sandals on their feet, each bearing on a great gold platter a spreading peacock, filed through the hall. Following them came roguish, curly-headed boys with yellow sucking pigs. Rose leaves were scattered by a laughing throng in the balconies above on the heads of those below. The fantastic audience was filing in to supper. Olmstead looked up. Some one threw him a rose. A slim-waisted, tall, strange being with blackened eyes and scarlet lips, leaned over and waved her hand as he passed.

While the ball was still at its height he slipped out. He had work ahead of him, hazardous work that he had only himself to blame for; he had created it of his own volition, because of a girl who two weeks ago was unknown to him—because of a girl who trusted him! He seemed to hear her saying. "It's a great mistake to know personally your victims." On account of this blunder he was probably in the most dangerous position of his whole life. He had to reckon with the Justifiables, the desperate Inner Circle, not one among them a friend. As he unlocked his door at the hotel they seemed to enter with him and surround him, reviling and threatening, all of them—Pierce, shorn of his respectability, the despicable Storch, the

gaily garbed Duflon with his important accent for his unimportant ideas—all of them denouncing him with blasphemous words. Suddenly they seemed to resemble one another horribly, each with the characteristics of his dishonorable trade written on his phantom face. God in Heaven, was that end inevitable for him too? He touched button after button till his room was a blaze of light. Was he too blasted by the same marks? By his youth and his education—not yet! By the mercy of what good he had done—not yet! By the beautiful women who had welcomed him, by the girl who believed in him—not yet! “Not yet,” he cried, “not yet!”

He changed his clothes hurriedly, and then sat down to think, to plan. He studied every word of the article that Ethel Blair had given him—the article she had told him would appear in the *Morning Era*. If only he could depend upon its being printed just that way!

Step by step he went over the situation. He had a terrible hour ahead of him, but so had the Justifiabes. He would have to make an accounting, but so would they. He smiled to think they had made of him a personage. They might have disposed of the unknown Olmstead, member of a mysterious association, but Olmstead, the millionaire from Australia, had to be accounted for. They were beat with their own weapons, hoist with their own petard!

He was ready for them, and, smiling grimly, he stepped out once more into the street.

This time he made his way to a respectable, unpretentious house on West 81st Street, the home of the timid Judge Pierce. He had already been roused.

“They’ve sent word they want me at the shop,” he said, letting Olmstead in at the basement door.

"Already?" exclaimed his visitor with well simulated nervousness.

"Anything wrong?" asked the Judge anxiously.

"Yes, we've made a terrible blunder!"

"No? You don't—you can't mean it!"

"Yes," Olmstead reiterated emphatically. "I do mean it! I hope I wasn't followed."

The Judge literally pulled him in through the narrow hallway, into what was evidently the dining room, as he stammered out: "What—what has happened?"

"The worst—we are suspected. They seem to know all but our names!"

The Judge fell back limp, breathing out in terrified gasps, "My God! My wife! My children!"

"Precisely." Olmstead watched him closely while pretending himself to be nervous and anxious.

To the Judge's neighbors it would have been a strange sight to see him so moved by such words, for any one of them would have vouched for him as a good father and husband, an all around worthy citizen. His children were plump, rosy and well cared for; his wife was apparently happy and entirely in love; he paid his taxes regularly and his name figured as Director on several charitable boards.

Olmstead sat waiting for his companion to recover sufficiently to be a satisfactory listener. It was only a matter of a few minutes when he stiffened up in his seat and said: "Well—well—speak out—what's happened?"

"The fact is," said Olmstead, "that the Inner Circle has gone crazy in their eagerness to annex spoils, any spoils. They're like starving cattle, with about as much discretion!"

"What happened?" demanded the Judge impatiently.

"I was followed tonight to the ball," Olmstead resumed, lashing himself to a semblance of great nervousness. "This time it was Cryder sent to spy upon me; Cryder, disguised as an Indian retainer, handing punch. Oh you know all about it! You helped plan it; you know you did!"

"I swear I was overruled—I swear it!"

"It's a pity," sneered Olmstead. "For the bungling work of your spy has done for us. Instead of waiting for the signal he went ahead for himself and fell for a diamond star."

"Well—well—what happened?" The Judge was plainly agitated.

"He slipped it over to me. A foolhardy trick if ever there was one! We must get together as soon as possible! This star——" He delved into his pocket for it.

"Don't take it out here—don't!" whispered his companion hoarsely.

Olmstead rose and strode up and down the room, as though in deep thought.

"We must get it back!" he cried out suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

"It must be returned! You must tell Storch and Duflon—they're sensible."

"They'll never consent!"

"It must be returned," Olmstead repeated firmly. "It's the only way out! It must be found in that house under a rug, or in a corner of the carpet in the great hall, otherwise——"

He paused expressively while the Judge repeated with varying inflections the word, "Impossible!"

"Well, then expect the worse!" Olmstead sat down again, apparently resigned.

"One or two of us may be embarrassed but the rest will be safe," ejaculated the Judge.

Olmstead turned impressively. "The moment has come," he said, "when all of us are threatened."

The Judge's face grew tense.

"I'm not safe," said Olmstead as though he were trying to brace himself to it. "The discovery of my connection with you all is imminent. The police are only holding off in order to make a complete haul——"

"My God! How do you know?"

"I know—I was actually warned by one of the guests to be careful of my valuables; she spoke of missing jewels—said there were detectives everywhere, on the lookout for someone in society with connections on the outside. I got away as soon as I could, and came here. I hope I wasn't followed."

"You—you came here!" echoed the Judge in an agony of apprehension.

"If it hadn't been for Cryder—damn him—everything would have been all right!"

Olmstead walked the room again, while the Judge told him over and over that his wife was lovely, that his children were innocent and vice versa.

"She has no thought of me but what's good, no suspicion that I could commit a crime. My children believe in me!"

"Yes, yes, my friend," said Olmstead with every show of sympathy, "the hell of any careful sinner is in being found out by those whose respect he cherishes."

"My children, my innocent children!"

"Therefore let us act," cried Olmstead at last in a tone of iron.

The Judge turned sickly eyes upon him and cowered in his chair.

"Discovery is inevitable unless the star is returned somehow," Olmstead went on relentlessly.

"Then we are ruined," gasped the Judge, "ruined—for the others will never consent!"

"Never," echoed Olmstead, narrowing his eyes upon the limp figure of despair opposite him. "Never—unless," he added in a ringing voice, "unless the diamonds in that star are pronounced valueless."

"What?" The Judge raised a white face of fear, so wet with perspiration that his side whiskers actually seemed to lengthen.

"It's the only way!"

"What can I do?" whispered the other in abject terror.

"Ah, that's more like it!" At last Olmstead had his companion where he wanted him. "Pull yourself together," he urged, and, to give him a chance, he lit a cigarette and blew a few whiffs into the air reflectively. With a trembling hand the Judge rose and poured himself out a glass of brandy from a buffet in the corner.

He fell once more into the chair opposite Olmstead, and abruptly upon the point at issue. "What are you going to ask me to do?" he gasped.

"The simplest thing in the world," said Olmstead, flicking the ashes from his cigarette. "The old game, a game known to every Trust in the world that calls itself a power—water the stock!"

The Judge looked at him, dumb.

"We are called to a meeting. The question uppermost in the minds of our financiers, with Herr Storch at their head, will be 'What is the star worth?' You know the game," Olmstead continued calmly. "You've worked it before—oh yes—when you secured that big

loan from our stockholders;—you remember the amount of it, and you know what the precious property was really worth! That time it was overvaluation.”

“Not so loud,” interrupted the Judge in an agony of apprehension, “not so loud.”

“You acted by advice of the honorable board. This time you have only to reverse the game—undervalue the stock.”

“Impossible,” breathed the Judge.

Olmstead shrugged and then observed slowly: “Our honorable association is making ready to plunder the homes of the rich—invade let us call it—and meanwhile Cryder, with his clumsy job, will have set every sleuth on the watch! The moment his victim discovers her loss we are, everyone of us, in danger.”

Fixing his eyes upon his shrinking host he added, with unmistakable emphasis, “It has already been announced that our invasion is to be in the hands of the Association’s most experienced, most trusted members.”

The Judge quailed before him. “No—not I!” He cried. “I’ve lost my nerve—I’m a sick man—I will not go.”

Olmstead stopped him with a look.

“My poor friend,” he said, “the easiest way is to put over my simple proposition. Come, be sensible. Your prowess and skill are known. You are trusted.”

The Judge was once more livid with fright.

“You can help me,” he whispered leaning forward and clutching Olmstead’s arm imploringly. “You can; you are in control of this venture, they’ll consult with you; you can keep my name off the list.”

“Witness now bribery among the office holders;

corruption and bribery!" exclaimed Olmstead rolling his eyes heavenward with mock seriousness. "Plenty of precedent for that," he said, gravely paying tribute to the memory of Hackett.

"I want to die at home," implored the Judge piteously. "Olmstead, you will be on the board of nomination; Olmstead, when they allot the men to do the work say that you will leave my name off the list?"

"The price," exclaimed Olmstead, "the price at last! I will keep your name off that list," he continued solemnly, "and my word is to be trusted—on condition——"

"What shall I do?" interrupted the Judge weakly. Briefly Olmstead outlined for him his plan of action. "Take your cue from me," he said in conclusion, "and follow on my lead. Play up sharp, with decision; no half measures! And now we must not arrive together."

"For God's sake—no——"

"No," echoed Olmstead reassuringly. "I'll go on with the goods; you follow."

Completely satisfied with what he had accomplished he nodded, and disappeared. In case of any possible question he had at least convinced one of the Inner Circle that he believed the jeweled star in his pocket to be genuine.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN the little back room of the dingy shop the game of cards had been halted while Cryder, in the still early morning hours, held the floor and told with plenty of slang and much honor to himself how the trick had been pulled off.

Olmstead arrived in time to hear him describe how Jack had shinnied up to the girl while he had lifted the stock off the bosom of a queen—how from out a lot of truck he had picked the genuine stuff.

And Olmstead yielded him full credit, looking anything but a hero as he said nervously: "We lost our heads—we shouldn't have done it—the risk is terrible." He strove to give every evidence of a frightened man.

"Risk—nothin'——"

"You've lost your grit!"

"If Hackett squeals," said Olmstead dully.

"Hackett!" He had the attention of every man in the room.

"He's in a hospital," Olmstead went on in the tone of one in the grip of a mighty fear. "Here's a note from Mrs. Dunstan—God knows what's to come of it——" Olmstead let it drop from an apparently nerveless hand.

Duffon read it out to as surprised an Inner Circle as ever met in conclave.

"Your man is terribly ill—asks for you—I promised to let you know——"

The note was genuine. Olmstead had received it from Mrs. Dunstan on his return to his hotel after the ball!

"How in thunder did he get there?" he asked before any of the others spoke. No one answered. Olmstead looked from face to face with apprehension.

"Well it's up to us to get him out——" he said at last.

"Us?" Duflon hissed it out for all the others.

"We're through," said Storch briefly.

"But I'll have to see him," Olmstead observed gloomily. "I'm up against it!"

"He ain't got nothin' on us——"

Olmstead turned suddenly with a question: "When did you see him last?"

"He was blue when we left him," growled Bolan. "He must have fallen in the street—he oughter have cashed in that night!"

At this moment Judge Pierce entered, pale and excited.

"Aw come, let's have a peep at the goods," said Cryder recovering first.

Olmstead handed out a small package.

The fact that the Judge's hands trembled as he unwrapped it occasioned no surprise. It was attributed to his natural eagerness.

A gleaming star fell to the table while the men, with varying expression, gloated over it.

"I'm afraid of this transaction," the Judge began nervously.

At this point with an assumption of tremendous importance Storch, as chairman, pulled up a chair, settled his striped waistcoat, cleared his throat and with the end of his pencil rapped for order.

"Gentlemen," he said in a speech that had evidently been prepared with great care, "this is an association, a great Trust, that does not act precipitately. When Mr. Cryder annexed the magnificent star that we are now about to manipulate, he was acting quite within the authority of this board. Mr. Cryder knows that our trust is founded on the principles of other great trusts, which do not hesitate to crush petty competitors, to wipe out threatening obstacles even if they mean the livelihood of the widow and orphan. He knows that the rule of our society demands no less the sacrifice of anyone who endangers its existence. If suspicion rests upon Mr. Olmstead we are in danger. As we hope to vie with the high financiers some one else must be suspected——"

The approval was unanimous, while the Judge looked over at Olmstead with an expression of relief. He bent with enthusiasm over the star. He held it to the light, frowned, and hastily took out his magnifying glass.

"Mr. Olmstead evidently does not know," the chairman now gave out, "that the young lady who stood beside him when Mr. Cryder so ably annexed the property now before us is—how shall I say it—is—well, marked for suspicion?"

"The young lady?" Olmstead repeated as though perplexed, while the other leaned back with an expression of the utmost satisfaction.

The chairman referred to some notes in his hand.

"Name, Ethel Blair—lives small flat—poor—no male in flat—one old lady—mother—our Susie—scrub woman——"

"What has that to do with it?" asked Olmstead, trying to emphasize his bewilderment adequately.

"She has had to do with us ever since the night you sat next her at dinner. That's the way we work," said the chairman, looking at Olmstead with great superiority. "If the necessity arises an intimate knowledge of that young lady's life will presently be conveyed to the police. Our Susie is at work on it. Miss Blair has twice visited the pawnshop that we patronized for lot 667. Miss Blair is of Southern stock; our Susie has observed that she is careless; the small black bag she carries is shabby, clasp imperfect. If our pawn tickets annoy us, Susie, who is unknown at the pawnshop, and who scrubs for the Blairs, will convey them to Miss Blair's pocket!"

"But she's poor—working for her living——"

"So she will be suspected sooner than the Australian millionaire, the Count's friend," observed the chairman with a diabolical smile.

"But she's on a newspaper," protested Olmstead affecting consternation.

,"A poor reporter who lost her job today!"

"I don't believe it!" cried Olmstead, and never did a man act uneasiness with greater skill.

"Susie was scrubbing when she told the old girl, her mother."

"My God!" The exclamation came from Judge Pierce.

"What is it? What's the matter?" Every eye was upon him.

"It's paste—paste!" The others hung upon his words paralyzed, while Olmstead threw him a look of gratitude.

"I mean it," cried the Judge, screaming at him. "I mean it!"

Olmstead jumped to his feet. "It's a trap," he announced excitedly, "a trap——"

"But that is of an absurdity," cried Duflon. "At a fancy ball the greatest, I could have told you had I been consulted, the richest wear stones of imitation!"

But Olmstead was not to be consoled. He strode up and down the room, apparently in an agony of nervousness.

Cryder, swearing at all of them and at himself, leaned over the stones which had been thrown out of their setting, to verify the Judge's decision. The star had dazzled him in the glow of the lights—he'd have taken his oath it was genuine—he had picked it from a mass of tinsel and imitation! Cursing, he acknowledged his hand must have slipped.

The chairman rapped for order, but in vain. The Inner Circle were all on their feet, hurling out reproaches, accusations, oaths, abjuring the language they had learned from Hackett, falling, every one of them, into their own cheap, vulgar vernacular.

Olmstead turned a flood of vituperation upon himself by suddenly exclaiming: "To risk our liberty for that!"

"You were fooled too!" cried the Judge.

"I never had a good look at it," expostulated Olmstead.

"He came to me trembling like a leaf, with a priceless jewel in his pocket," mocked the Judge.

"Aw, come to!" one of them hurled at him contemptuously.

"That newspaper woman," cried Olmstead, "she suspects something; I'm sure of it! She stuck to me like a leech; she asked me questions; she's something on the Era."

"Aw, get on to yer nerve!"

"If Hackett stays pat we're all right!"

While this was going on some one had opened the door and taken in the morning papers. Olmstead captured "The Era." He turned the pages over nervously. At last he found what he wanted—all there—exactly as he had read it a few hours before! And then he let them have it. He began reading out the headlines. At the first words the Inner Circle fought for the paper, and somehow, among them they brought out: "Criminal Trust Discovered—French and American monopoly—Representative in New York society—Big social game his lay—Police on his trail——"

"We're done for!" gasped the Judge with a face all contorted with fear. The words were echoed through the room in a tremulous wave of anxiety.

"My God—my innocent wife—my helpless children——" moaned the Judge.

"It's respectability he's suffering from," muttered Cryder contemptuously.

Olmstead commanded silence for a minute by his manner. "Don't act like a pack of fools," he said. "Give me time. I know this Miss Blair—I'll do what I can——"

They covered him with scowls.

"You got us into this!" he began turning upon Cryder.

"The time has come to quit," interrupted the chairman.

"How much are we out?" asked Bolan, blinking his eyes.

"How much are we in?"

"That's it! That's it!"

"Gentlemen—gentlemen—the Inner Circle is in danger," protested Olmstead.

"Damn the Inner Circle!" burst from two of them.

"There is no Inner Circle!" Storch cried authoritatively.

Olmstead's eyes gleamed as he sat looking from one to the other of his companions.

"We've been sold," exclaimed Bolan, "played with! We've been tools in the power of one man! We've been hypnotized while he and his pal have been living on the fat of the land!"

"My table is strewn with bills," cried Olmstead, "but you gentlemen will see me through——"

The chairman walked to the head of the table, rapped and demanded to be heard. "The good of the many demands the sacrifice of one," he announced gravely.

"Let us hold together!" cried Olmstead, "and form again, the Justifiables——"

"To hell with the Justifiables," came from all sides in an avalanche of oaths that fell thick and fast. Olmstead went on, regardless of them, forcing repudiation from all sides.

"Let us remember the principles upon which our society was founded," he cried. "Loyalty—equal risk—equal division——"

"You can divide with yourself," cried one.

"We ain't divided none of your luxuries," cried another.

"Let us hold together," repeated Olmstead as though possessed of but one idea.

To a man they answered with as many oaths. He was told to get out, to shift for himself—what he did was no concern of theirs.

"So," cried Olmstead at last at bay, "you throw me over?"

"Bah, we don't know you!"

"I'm no longer one of you?"

No one protested; not one held out a hand. At last in a voice that rang through the room he said at the door: "The old law of the universe—each man for himself and the devil take the hindermost!"

It was his farewell.

A minute later he stood in the street, alone and free!

He was free, without a cent he could call his own. At his hotel a pile of bills awaited him. They were for every thing, even for the clothes on his back.

He walked a few blocks and then stood irresolute. He could return and bring those men to his feet with a sight of Mildred Dunstan's check. He could put himself in command as his father had. He could continue to get his living precariously, but with excitement, with adventure. If he had been a rich man's son he could have satisfied that craving in what are called legitimate ways. But he was the son of a man who had been driven to work in a lead mine, where some men stayed all their lives, content or not. He was the son of a man who had been unwilling to stay down—that was something to remember!

He could return, reorganize the Inner Circle and be a leader among them like his father, and for the same reasons—because he was superior, because he was born to command, because he was of the calibre that makes presidents, commanders, generals, heads, chiefs.

Money—that was his handicap. Well then, by thunder, he'd show what he could do without it! He felt the spirit of a conquerer stirring within him so

strongly that he looked about startled, fearing for a moment that he had spoken his thought aloud.

He pulled himself together, hailed a car and in less than a quarter of an hour, had arrived at the hospital where Hackett lay dying in the midst of comforts provided by Mildred Dunstan. He strode past the registrar with a nod.

At the door of Hackett's room a nurse met him gravely; another stood within at his bedside. She crossed over to Olmstead as he entered.

"He became unconscious about an hour ago," she said gently, "but before that he said to give you this, sir, when you came. He made me wrap it in paper and write on it, 'The Last Asset'—whatever that meant, poor soul."

As she handed Olmstead a small package Hackett opened his eyes.

"I think he wants you to undo it," she explained.

Olmstead did so slowly. "His diary," he said, turning over the pages of the little black book. "There's one page torn," he cried out sharply, and at the same moment he discovered an envelope laid in the book.

"Yes," said the nurse with a shade of protest, "he tore it out himself, when he seemed a bit stronger. It's there in the envelope; I sealed it up in it for him; I gave him a pencil, and I watched while he wrote, oh with such difficulty, those same words: 'The Last Asset.' He seemed satisfied after that——"

Olmstead broke open the envelope. On the torn sheet, in faint letters, he made out the words "Amiens—Lot 269—Sold to Arpad Dunstan." He turned the envelope over and read again, "The Last Asset."

The nurse was watching him curiously. "He said you'd understand."

Olmstead leaned over the bed. "I do," he whispered with excitement. "I do. Speak—tell me more——"

But Hackett was, by every sign, beyond the sound of his voice.

He stood with that mysterious paper in his hand under the eyes of the nurse, fighting for self-control. After all it was his father lying there—after all it was the end——

Presently he recovered and examined the paper again, intently. It seemed to him, somehow, in that excited moment, like a message from another world, a substitute for something that at times had been a weight like lead in his breast pocket. The kindest eyes in the kindest face he had ever known seemed to be looking out at him through a mist of tears. For all her charm, for all her pride, for all her apparent light-heartedness she must often have had moments of tremulous anxiety when she wondered what had become of that cheque which had never been returned. If he were to get it back to her—How grateful she would be! He saw himself returning it with the grand air of a grand gentleman. He would explain that it had fallen into his hands—that was all. That would be generous, most generous, magnanimous and condescending. And she would know that he knew. A secret between them; and before him she would lower her eyes in confusion, bow her head humbly, offer her thanks timidly. This lady old enough to be his mother! This lady who had accepted him simply because she liked him! This lady who had once confided in him just because she trusted him! Now to make her cringe before him, wondering how much he knew and what he thought! No, he wasn't such a cad as that—no. It came over him suddenly that there was only one way, one really fine

way to spare her pain, and that was to spare her all knowledge that anyone in the world knew aught that could shame her. She should go on smiling, holding her brave head up to the end of her life, as far as he was concerned, to the end of her life! It might be hard; it might be impossible for him to pull out— He glanced at the paper in his hand again—but no, he swore, a woman who had been kind to him shouldn't suffer!

"It's the end," whispered the nurse as the dying man's labored breathing filled the room. Then she stood nervously watching the gentleman who, for all his high connections and his fine appearance, was certainly behaving queerly.

Instead of praying or even looking serious, he stood almost with a smile upon his face, tearing into tiny bits a long pinkish paper, unmistakably a check of some sort that he had taken from his pocket.

"God rest his soul," prayed the nurse.

"He will—he will," said the gentleman with fervor. And a few minutes later he dropped on the sheet that she had pulled over the dead man's face the tiny, tiny bits of pink paper with a gesture as though he were strewing flowers there.

Presently he found himself in the hall wandering along in an aimless sort of way towards the registrar's office. An official touched him on the arm.

"What must I do?" he asked in utter helplessness.

"Mrs. Dunstan has requested us to attend to everything," said the man deferentially. "She meant to be here; she asked us to tell you that, but something must have happened for she hasn't come, and Mr. Dunstan, it seems, is expected home any minute; his secretary telephoned here from the house to try to find her."

Olmstead followed the official into the directors' room where, after answering a few necessary questions, he sank into a chair, apparently deeply moved. For some minutes he sat silent with eyes closed. When he opened them he asked if he might write a most urgent note, and if they would call a messenger for him.

It was amazing, that note, in the face of so much that was important.

It was to Miss Blair. It asked her to change her plans. "Come to the Dunstan house in an hour—ask for me—your story will be there——" Then signing it "Yours Forever," he smiled courteously upon the hospital attendants, and assured them he would return later.

CHAPTER XIX

IN the front hall of the Dunstan house Olmstead stood interviewing the small Buttons, who was so awe stricken that his voice sunk to a whisper as he said:

"The boss has came—I mean Mr. Dunstan, sir—an' we're all upset, cook sez—an' Stevens sez as how no one's to be let in!"

But Olmstead's manner would have commanded one bigger and more important.

"I must see Mr. Dunstan at once," he answered. "Where is he?"

"Oh, he's goin' on somethin' awful sir—in his office sir——"

"Take me down."

And Jimmy, who would have gone through a hail of fire for Olmstead, led the way.

At the top of a short flight of stairs he put a detaining hand on the boy's shoulder. They paused to listen.

In the hall below where the great man was evidently surrounded by confidential secretaries, stenographers and messenger boys, they could hear him raging at the top of his voice.

"I should have been here hours ago," he stormed, "if it weren't for bad management all along the road—everywhere. Such a set of incompetent, undeserving numbskulls! Every last man will be discharged—by

Jupiter—every man of them, as my name is Arpad Dunstan! I interviewed the conductor, the gripman, the porter, the fireman, and not one of them knew a thing. The train was delayed, unconscionably delayed. Why? To wait for another! Whole schedule upset! When would the other be along? No one knew; no one knew!" he bellowed in a fresh torrent of rage. "No one knew anything. I didn't tell them who I was. If I had, no one would have believed me! Why?" he asked in a freshly ascending crescendo. "Why? Because no director ever traveled on his own road without having the way prepared for him. We'll have all that changed; mark me—this very night—we'll have it changed—now——"

A door slammed, the voice diminished.

"You may take my card in now, Jimmy. Don't be afraid," said Olmstead kindly, "he wants to see me."

Jimmy touched his cap, and Olmstead followed him down the short flight of stairs. Jimmy opened the door and Olmstead heard:

"Train 39 is supposed to have a dining car! And when I asked for food there was not so much as a sandwich left. Here, take this," he cried out evidently to one of his stenographers.

The door closed leaving Olmstead to picture the great President of the New Grade beginning to crush out the lives of his miserable delinquents.

Presently Jimmy came out grinning and holding the door wide open for Olmstead to enter.

His feet clung to the deep carpet and he had, for a moment, a confused sense of bells, attendants, velvet chairs, soft cushions, glowing fire, great fireplace, massive furniture in a room not in the least like the conventional place of business.

"Come in, come in," said the great financier. "I've heard of you; my wife seems to have taken a fancy to you."

The most powerful magnate of his day gripped his hand.

"I fear I may have come at an inopportune moment," Olmstead observed. "I judge something has gone wrong on your road."

At his words the railroad president was off again. "Wrong? Actually I couldn't see to read," he hurled out. "Electric lights which we advertise, all out of order. By the great Jupiter! And how do you think that car was lighted? By gas, sir, gas, two dim burners in the middle of the car! Read? My eyes are starting out of my head with the strain. Come back again when I ring," he commanded over his shoulder.

Secretaries, messengers, attendants, faded away.

"I have asked to see you," Olmstead began as soon as they were alone, "because I think I may be of assistance in tracing your gold service."

"You don't say? Well, you'll be glad to hear that the police are on the track of it too! Chief's waiting to see me now. Sit down—sit down," the financier invited cordially, crossing over to a small table on which stood a tray.

"Actually I haven't had a morsel to eat today," he said by way of apology as he bit into a sandwich, "not a morsel! Just arrived, not more than a quarter of an hour ago! Dining car was announced on the schedule so I went on the train without any luncheon."

"Oh, we've all been through that," Olmstead remarked carelessly.

Dunstan sat down and looked at him with a shade of contempt. "Stood it—eh—like all the rest? As

long as the public stands such things—" he raised his shoulders expressively as if to say his responsibility ended there.

"Oh, I complained—I wrote to the head of the road——"

Olmstead sat sparring for time, studying his man as he spoke, studying him intently with the acuteness of one facing a last extremity.

"It's the business of the employees, sir, the employees," thundered Dunstan. "I'm on fifty Boards, fifty. I'm director of two dozen roads; my hands are full—" His mouth happened to be too at that juncture which gave Olmstead the chance to inquire:

"Who is responsible?"

Dunstan resumed with great dignity: "I intend sir to make this an issue. The public will stand for such neglect of duty, but not I. The late Mr. Vanderbilt's views about the public express mine sir—the public be damned!"

"Until today!" put in Olmstead easily.

"Precisely, precisely; I'm the man who won't stand it! I intended to get here five hours ago; we missed connections somewhere; no one knew what we were waiting for; no one knew when we would start, no one knew anything! Such abominable ignorance, such damnable carelessness! And such service! Actually you couldn't get a decent drink! Apollinaris had given out and the lazy porter hadn't washed out the water cooler in a month. I always get what I want," he thundered in a voice of iron, "and as I live I'll get it now on the New Grade!"

In that room, where some of the greatest money transactions in the financial history of the country had been planned and executed, Olmstead sat bracing him-

self against the consciousness of what this man's power meant, knowing full well that hundreds of men before him had been crushed by the sense of it—commanded, driven, ignored, ruined.

"So you have something to say in regard to that stolen property of mine?" queried Dunstan, looking at him with shrewd eyes.

Olmstead nodded across the mahogany table that stood between them on the red rug. In a single glance he had taken in every detail of it, and now, finally, it rested on the painted miniature of a charming woman. He recognized the face of Mildred Dunstan and then he heard her husband saying: "The thief will be arrested today."

Olmstead started as though a voice had called "Time!" Further sparring was out of the question. He threw back his head and entered the ring with this: "Unless you prevent it."

Mr. Dunstan smiled, but not with kindness, at what he seemed to consider the facetiousness of his visitor, who, in the pause, repeated with emphasis: "Unless you prevent it!"

"I—I prevent it?" cried Dunstan. "Whoever expects any sympathy from me for any delinquent of any sort will be disappointed! No sir, let every man do his duty!"

Olmstead ignored this to assert almost defiantly—"I know who took your dishes!"

Dunstan looked his surprise just for a second. Then he said, with the air of a man prepared for what was sure to follow, "Well, I repeat, he need expect no mercy from me—none sir, none."

"One of the men who conducted that enterprise,"

Olmstead resumed, looking far into the distance, "began life as a plain workman."

Dunstan gave a contemptuous grunt as he bent over the tray again.

"He was one of the directors of a Trust, a jewel Trust," said Olmstead quite as though he were making a most ordinary statement. "He has a son who inherited from his father, well, mostly prejudices."

"Prejudices?" echoed Dunstan.

"Yes, he was prejudiced against the heads of great corporations."

"Well, that's not uncommon nowadays," said Dunstan, moving over to the door, quite obviously intending to end an interview that was leading nowhere.

"To that man," announced Olmstead in a ringing voice, "the Justifiable Association owed its existence."

Something in the tone arrested Dunstan where he stood.

"A Jewel Trust," explained Olmstead, "that, like other great trusts, gets its materials as cheaply as possible and can, therefore, undersell its competitors."

"I never heard of it," said Dunstan, standing with his back to the door.

"It was they who sold seven rubies—rubies known to jewelers as the real bloods—— They sold them absurdly cheap."

Mr. Dunstan came back into the room at this.

"Yes, they negotiated that deal," said Olmstead rising now. "The man to whom they sold those rubies——"

Dunstan stood with his eyes upon Olmstead who finished his sentence evenly.

"That man still has them."

Mr. Dunstan had grown a trifle pale. "It's close

in here," he said, suddenly crossing to a window and flinging it open. "Abominable ventilation on those cars today; freezing or roasting, all due to carelessness; no one to look after that blundering porter. There'll be some one—by Jupiter——"

"Those rubies," interrupted Olmstead, "were bought for six thousand dollars. Think of it, Mr. Dunstan, they were worth at least ten times that!"

"How do you know?" asked Dunstan quickly.

"Why, from the Justifiable Association," said Olmstead simply.

"You know them?"

"Oh yes—yes! Until a few hours ago I was one of them."

"You dare?"

"Why not? You would surely not have bought rubies from them if they had not been all right; you would not have encouraged them."

Olmstead made this statement without the least excitement or hint of sarcasm; it was merely a plain statement.

"I—I? If I bought rubies I paid for them. My business was not to enquire where they came from." Dunstan was once more his masterful self.

Olmstead interrupted him suavely: "I think you would have difficulty in convincing your world that you, a collector, skilled in the knowledge of stones, should have been deceived in these flawless rubies, and at a time when the lost rubies, belonging to the present Count de Guित्रy's father, were the talk of two continents."

"I presume this is a put up job between you and this Frenchman to extract money—" the financier burst out contemptuously.

"Guitry? Oh dear me no, he's a baby in the ways of high finance. Poor devil, he's still trying to brush away the gnats. You and I deal with nothing less than camels."

"How dare you class yourself with me?" cried Dunstan.

"Because, my dear sir, we of the Justifiables have modeled ourselves on you, the big financiers of the nation." Olmstead delivered this with one of his most charming smiles, while Dunstan looked as though he would burst through the bondage of his collar, so crimson was he with indignation.

"The methods of high finance, sir, are unknown to such as you!"

"I can quite understand," Olmstead resumed in a soothing tone, "that you regard us as children in the game, we who have to concentrate our poor energies on some single individual. That's our weakness—our attacks must be personal!"

"Ridiculous, ridiculous," muttered Dunstan, striding up and down the room.

"You're a railroad president, rich, respected, and yet you run a road where misrepresentation is as common as the traveler——"

"Sir, it is time to end this!" Dunstan in high indignation strode once more to the door.

This time Olmstead stopped him with something more serious.

"You have a collection of precious stones," he began, "a beautiful collection, lodged in a great house. You have precious stones, for which you paid a fabulous sum because you couldn't get them otherwise. When you could get them otherwise——"

The two men faced each other.

"You have in this collection," said Olmstead, "seven rubies that were stolen—taken—lifted by the direct methods that you so disapprove."

"I had nothing to do with it," the millionaire blurted out.

"You bought the jewels."

"And what then?"

"You bought stolen goods, knowing they were stolen," answered the other.

"And what if I deny that I have the rubies?" Dunstan demanded with asperity.

"I have the date of the transaction which made you the owner of them," said Olmstead. "I have the affidavit of the witness!"

"The word of the thief who stole them, I presume! I defy you!"

As Dunstan pressed an electric button, Olmstead drew from his pocket a jewel case.

"I have this besides," he said impressively, placing it on the table before him. "You did not buy with the rubies the skeleton of the famous star necklace which belonged to the house of Guity for a century—the necklace that was once the property of a Queen. Each one of those rubies, which you have in your safe, fits exactly into the old French filigree setting."

He put his hand to the clasp on the box, but Dunstan stayed him with a gesture. 'An impassive secretary appeared at the door.

"Well, what do you want?" thundered his master.

"You—Sir—I thought you rang, sir."

"Well, don't think; and don't stand there mumbling. By Jupiter, I've had enough of that all day on the trains. Conductors mumbling—I'll be hanged if I could tell one place from another—all sounded the

same, all of them. Get out, and don't come in again until you're sent for." The secretary disappeared.

Presently Dunstan reached out and handed Olmstead a box of cigars.

"Thanks," said the latter, "I prefer these."

He selected a cigarette from his own case while Dunstan took a cigar and puffed silently for a moment. Two or three times he glanced over at Olmstead before he began to speak.

"Sit down," he said at last. "You don't understand the temptation to a collector to acquire things. I'm above all a collector. The truth about that kind of temptation is extraordinary; it takes possession of one to an incredible extent—to a degree that people not so tempted can't understand. It's a passion! You see something you can't get—you must get it! Why, in the British Museum they have to be on constant guard against the book lover, the art lover—men who wouldn't steal for the world! Well, precious stones are a passion with me. I couldn't resist these rubies; I had to have them. I couldn't get them any other way. You don't understand that sort of temptation."

"Oh yes I do, I assure you I do," said Olmstead coolly, "it's like hunger."

"Precisely."

"Well I've been hungry—for food!"

Half a minute passed.

"Your price?" Dunstan's lips framed the words with deference, without a shade of insult.

Olmstead answered deliberately. "I have no desire to take advantage of you in any way, I appreciate that we are all high financiers together." Dunstan winced, but Olmstead went on calmly. "I must ask, because you still uphold certain traditions, immunity for me

and for the members of the Justifiable Association of the United States and Europe."

"It really exists?" asked Dunstan incredulously.

"It existed," said Olmstead, "until an hour ago."

Then, without giving too many details, he explained briefly the aims of the association.

"A Trust," he observed with perfect equanimity, "which I was brought up to believe, different from other trusts only in the very first methods of acquiring stock. When its capital was big enough my father dreamed that the members would conduct themselves so that they should some day be recognized as decent, decorous citizens. He prophesied that a new phrase would be coined that should proclaim us pioneers in the just distribution of wealth."

Olmstead was as serene and serious as though his proposition were beyond reproach, while Dunstan sat watching him apparently fascinated by its impudence.

"Before that," Olmstead continued, "my father and a friend had worked alone, just the two of them, looking upon themselves as criminals—oh that was some fifteen years ago, before newspapers and magazines and books had begun to lay bare the ways and manners of the criminal rich. They were ashamed of themselves, ashamed of their profession, they sulked about in the dark, shabby and ill at ease."

"Naturally," Dunstan took courage to grunt out.

"Yes," Olmstead granted, "until they found the literature of the country flooded with what they translated into their justification."

"Nonsense," cried Dunstan brusquely.

But Olmstead went on unperturbed: "They collected a library of quotations to uphold them, to give them courage, to make excuses for them that they

might never have known enough to make for themselves. It was some book, for instance, that brought my father to the conclusion that the men who had set him as a youth to work in a lead mine knew that it meant ultimate invalidism——”

“Such things shouldn’t be allowed,” interposed Dunstan, evidently quite willing to leave his visitor in doubt as to just what he meant.

“Then, somewhere, he read that life preservers were often secretly loaded with bars of iron to eke out the standard weight supposed to be entirely due to cork.”

Here Dunstan ejaculated with visible irritation, “Newspaper talk!”

“Well, yes,” Olmstead admitted again, “but having lost his wife in a steamboat accident he brooded over it, while I, a motherless youngster, was running about wild. There was a lot in print, even at that time, about great corporations who fail to do their duty.”

Dunstan’s lips shut tightly as if with an effort at self-repression.

“It was in the air, that sort of thing. Authors delighted in showing up and condemning the difference between the justice meted out to crimes committed by individuals and crimes committed by corporations. I remember a chapter on that subject——”

“Oh, cheap literature,” Dunstan interrupted sullenly.

“As you please, but it was in a book endorsed by a President of the United States, a book called wholesome and sane. It was, however, only one of a dozen that served to wake my father and his friend up to what they ever after called ‘facts’. They found accusations, of every sort, in the public prints against the nation’s greatest men. They read about the dastardly trickery of oil and coal magnates, the devilish treachery

of the meat trusts. They had at the tips of their tongues quotations about the thieves in Wall Street, the knaves in the banking world; they read charges of gross corruption flung by one political party into the teeth of the other."

"That comes of the freedom of the press," Dunstan muttered bitterly. "If I had my way they'd be muzzled—the liars!"

"I expected to hear you say that," cried Olmstead with fervor. "Yet, if it isn't true why don't you sue them for libel? That's the thing I could never understand—that you, the big men of the country, should submit——"

"Oh, you could never get a verdict," said Dunstan at last, lamely.

"Well, it's a bad thing," observed Olmstead, "for a man who is up against it to read, for instance—'Cecil Rhodes looked neither to the right nor the left, being indifferent to the moral aspect of any action.' My father quoted that to me over and over when, finally, he had decided to take me off the streets and bring me up as a gentleman. Cecil Rhodes was my hero! With that quotation my father convinced me I could be generous, industrious, courageous, educated and lacking in morals——"

Dunstan straightened intuitively to protest. He shifted his chair and his cigar. In fact the latter had gone out, observing which he flung it to one side, saying:

"Tell me more about that Association. What killed it?"

"Well the organizers themselves were corrupt; and trying to imitate the ways of the high financiers didn't improve them," Olmstead remarked drily. "They

began to sacrifice, to deceive, to betray one another after the ways sanctioned by other trusts. They speculated with the funds entrusted to their keeping, the funds of their stockholders. It was a big step even for them and followed, it is worth while noting, upon the Stuyvesant bank collapse and the withdrawal of the great concern's capital by the members of its board, by its stockholders and their friends."

Dunstan sat with his chin buried in his collar, intently listening while the young man graphically described the moral effect upon such a band of men as the Justifiabes, when they learned from the daily papers that the depositors, who had no friends in the concern—even widows and orphans, had been sacrificed to the millionaires who had received advance notification.

Dunstan frowned, and remained silent.

"So the Justifiabes went down—down,—” the young man resumed gravely, “and at last they even considered the sacrifice of one who had served them, the best of them—myself.”

“You’re rid of them—eh?”

“Oh yes, yes,” Olmstead replied easily.

Dunstan grunted, made a tour of the room, came back, lit another cigar, took a long thoughtful pull at it, and then said, “Go on.”

“There’s very little more, except that even my father, who really started with ideals, finally invested for his own private ends in information that should have belonged to the Association. And now I—I am following in his footsteps, for I am the only man alive who knows to whom the Real Bloods were sold! That information, Mr. Dunstan, belongs rightly to the Trust, and here am I using it for my own ends.”

Arpad Dunstan eyed his visitor bravely.

"But you have asked for nothing!" he observed at last.

"Not yet," said Olmstead. Finally he broke the silence that followed with this frank statement:

"I intended when I entered into a transaction, which in our books is set down opposite the name of Dunstan——"

"My God!"

"Compose yourself—you are in no danger now. I intended to sacrifice to our increase of income your daughter, your wife, the Count de Guित्रy, yourself. When I had everything ready to crush the Count, I found that I had a real affection for him. Your wife through an accident was good to me, your daughter confided in me. I met that charming old lady, Mrs. Dunstan's mother; they showed me their side of you; they all took me on faith; they gave me a chance; they met me half way and disarmed me; I had been fool-hardy enough to know my victims personally. As long as I lived outside their world I could crush them one by one, beggar them if need be. What followed our exploits in your houses was no concern of mine so long as we escaped with our booty. Until I became one of you I didn't care a damn what happened to you."

Dunstan recalled the celebrated phrase which he had quoted a few minutes before about that same public.

"That's true of any disaster," he observed aloud, "casualties happen every day. By Jupiter, it's only when you know the victims personally that you are concerned. Indiscriminate people may be victimized, but as soon as one single face in the crowd stands out it gets on the nerves. That's true——"

Dunstan walked up and down the room several times before he spoke again. Then he came abruptly to this: "Does the Count know who you are?"

"He does not."

"Does he know of my transaction—I mean—you know——"

Olmstead glanced at the clock on the mantel.

"André de Guित्रy is now your son-in-law——," he answered.

Arpad Dunstan sat down without a word.

"I know Guित्रy well," Olmstead continued. "He is a gentleman, one of the few real gentlemen in the world; he will make your daughter absolutely happy."

"But how explain?" Dunstan asked after some moments.

"You will not be called upon to explain. Your consent, your forgiveness will be all that the young couple will ask."

"But this Frenchman——"

"He knows nothing about you or me," said Olmstead reassuringly, "and unless you confess——"

"Confess—bah! Sin and suffer alone; sin and atone alone; that's my philosophy."

"God knows I agree with you," burst fervently from Olmstead's lips.

"Confession is a consolation of the weak, nine times out of ten. I'll look out for this Frenchman; that's atonement. I'll hold out my hand to him and own myself beaten; a bitter pill for a man like me."

Olmstead glanced at the beautiful portrait on the table, and a wave of actual joy surged through him at the happiness he had wrought.

"Now you and I—let's come to terms," ventured the great financier at last.

"Certainly," said Olmstead graciously. "I came here to negotiate. First then, may I beg that you will call off the police who have sent you word they are on the trail of your property, and who, by the way, are on the wrong track and may excessively embarrass someone who is quite innocent?"

"I give you my word as a——"

"Your word will do," said Olmstead with dignity.

"What else?" asked Dunstan.

"In the service of my Association I have contracted debts of which your son-in-law was unaware, but which nevertheless might involve him unpleasantly."

Dunstan drew a check book towards him and sat with pen suspended as he said: "But you? I am prepared to pay for your silence—to pay well for it."

"And now," said Olmstead, with some deliberation, "I must be fair with you." He opened the box still before him and revealed it empty. "It was merely a battered old jewel case that I bought half an hour ago from a pawn broker for ten cents." He replaced it quietly in his pocket.

Admiration gleamed from the older man's eyes as he asked: "Would you mind telling me how old you are?"

"Twenty-five," Olmstead answered.

"You are unusual for so young a man, perhaps for any man."

Olmstead glowed as he observed: "Not young for my business. It's only when you're very young that you have the nerve. I'm losing mine."

Dunstan gave an audible grunt.

"Yes I'm losing mine," the young man repeated, "because my father didn't realize that by giving me,

first an education and then a chance, he was becoming a reformer of the most active sort."

Olmstead said this in a low tone but it reached and brought Dunstan to his feet with a quick movement.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," he cried, "I hoped you'd say it; I'm glad."

"You see," the young man explained simply, "it was the chance I had to know you all that made me less vindictive. I was brought up to believe in a millionaire type just as you believe in a criminal type. I was taught that no millionaires were to be trusted. When I began to know them, really know them from the inside, and share in their luxuries, my point of view changed. First they received me as an equal, then they courted me. Good Lord! how I changed under their flattery, so unlike the cold distance there had always been between us. At last I became the recipient of favors, favors at the hands of my enemies! That was the last touch; I became unfit for service to my own association."

The great man, accustomed to bullying every one, stood now meekly listening to this most amazing confession.

"I began to appreciate," said Olmstead after a moment "that the rich man, born rich, was in the running too, and the more I learned about him the more the feeling grew in me that if I could outstrip him, or even catch up with him, it would somehow prove me the better man. The chance, that's what I wanted! My companions had always talked of luck! But I began to wonder if it wasn't brains that counted; I began to feel a longing to pit my brains against some big man—a man worth while——"

Olmstead looked up into the big man's eyes.

"You're the only person in all the world who ever got the better of me," he exclaimed. "By Jupiter, you're clever," he added with genuine admiration, "damn clever——"

He held out his hand and Olmstead gripped it, smiling. The big man was at bottom so human, so very human.

"What are you going to do now?" he asked presently.

"You want me to go," said Olmstead, "so that you can reorganize the New Grade! From your remarks as I came into the room I judge there will be a vacancy."

"By Jupiter!"

With that repeated over and over Dunstan began striding up and down the room with a certain excitement. Several times he turned and looked at Olmstead, strong, clean, broad, handsome, young—the man who had compelled his admiration, the man who had reformed, the man who knew something about him that no one else in the world knew. Ah, yes, perhaps there was that.

"How would you like to have the chance, young man," he said, pausing at last before Olmstead, "to go into business, legitimate business; settle down?"

"I had that in mind. I——"

"Not when you came here!" exclaimed Dunstan.

"Oh no—Lord no! But I'm going to marry." Olmstead brought it out sheepishly as any man in love, and then still more sheepishly he added: "Er—she doesn't know it—yet——"

"Suppose you tell her you're going to work for me on the New Grade?"

"That would make it easier," said Olmstead "I'm to see her in a few minutes!"

Dunstan touched the bell and resuming his peremptory, masterful manner said:

"We'll clinch it now—now——"

THE END

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